

DEATHREALM

THE LAND WHERE HORROR DWELLS

ISSUE #13, FALL/WINTER 1990

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DEATHREALM

THE LAND WHERE HORROR DWELLS

ISSUE #13 FALL/WINTER, 1990

WINNER OF THE 1990 SPWAO

BEST MAGAZINE AWARD

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Ronald Kelly

A PINCH OF SNUFF

William R. Trotter

BASIC G. PICO, ESQ.

FORBIDDEN TEXTS

Letters

INTO THE SHADOWS

Interview with James Robert Smith

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This issue dedicated to:
Dave Wilson's confounded
effluvia.

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DEATHCON II

REALM sponsored
H.P. Lovecraft Centen-

ial Barbeque. And what a time. A whole mess of folks piled into the Rainey house, for a feast of Nyarlathotep Ribs, Ears of Azathoth, Great Old Ones on a Stick, and Yog-Sothoth Pudding. Yum! Included in the unruly mob were famous people like Fred Chappell, Elizabeth Massie, Scott Yost, Bill Trotter, James Robert Smith, Jeff Williams (of the new *MESU/AH* Newsletter), artist Mark Kingsley, and Basil G. Pigg. The highlight of the evening was when one of our neighbors, having spotted the big **DEATHREALM** sign that put up to mark our location for newcomers, came over to ask if we were "a bunch of Satanists"—no joke. Since his daughter and my daughter play together, he was concerned that we might be up to something "dangerous." For the record, **DEATHCON II** was NOT a Satanic convention, nor was it a gathering to sacrifice babies or anything, though there were certainly a couple of children in the house that I'd have happily thrown on the grill. Hey, if we were devil worshippers, common sense would dictate that we not put up a big sign in the middle of a fairly populous, conservative neighborhood. This incident gave me pause to think on how ineptant so much of this great, "free" society has become. Some readers may know already of the **DARK SIDE** story: editor Shannon Riley ran into a fair amount of trouble in her hometown because of the nature of her magazine—one not so different from **DEATHREALM** in content.

The morality police immediately frowned on her. Her printer "lost" her copy for an issue; someone broke into her computer files and destroyed a large part of her database; a rock was thrown through the window of her home. Eventually, she made the decision to move, rather than give in to pressure and close down the magazine. Yeah, this is U.S.A., c.1990. While I personally have had

no such problems, reports of this type of harassment are becoming more and more common. I ask you, who has the "morality"

problem—the one publishing fiction [I stress this word]; it means imaginary, fabricated, NOT REAL], or the one who by violence tries to put a halt to something they don't like or understand? From what I've seen of 1990 so far, I think the state of the nation can be summed up by the phrase "Common Sense Takes a Holiday." To my readers, I implore you: don't contribute to the problem. Keep yourselves educated. Don't let closed-minded, tiny-brained

wipers of other people's bottoms trample your first amendment freedom. Mind you, I don't advocate immorality. I don't advocate pushing the first amendment to its limit just for its own sake. Going to that extreme tends to be very immature and counter-productive. There are a lot of pretty wicked things going around in the media that I don't want anything to do with, especially when it might concern my daughter. But the answer is NOT across-the-board legislation, and vigilanteism—the view more and more embraced by conservatives in this country. You can't legislate morality, as all you intelligent people know. What you can do is educate people, and influence morality in a positive way. That would be my idea, at least. I guess it's wishful thinking, though, since having a brain in your head is not the trendiest thing. ¶ Anyway, the **DEATHCON II** "incident" was to laugh. If not for Mr. Neighbor, it might have been just another party. For after we ran *Frotn Beyond* and *Trinity is Still my Name*—some double feature, eh? And thanks to Bill Trotter for his fabulous Unnameable Beasts. ¶ Next time: Jeffrey Oster's sequel to *Snowright* (**DEATHREALM** #4), as well as fiction by Barb Hendee and Jeffrey Thomas.

Til then,

Mark Rainey

Mark Rainey

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OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

Y E L E T T R E C O L U M N E

Marge B. Simon
Ocala, FL

I JUST FINISHED DEATHREALM #12 and could not put it down! Fantastic stories and art. Best yet, and I'm sure I've said that before, but this ish contained some fine reading not only in terms of shockers but in variety of approaches. I commend you on your overall theme that seems to create a mood mixing horror with mundane life situations, mostly urban, or centering around a city or town, with just the bane of us of tossed in, especially with *New Order*—bravo on your collaboration with Andrea Locke. *Tincture* (a remarkable approach to unveiling a story, and Kyle-Kiehl makes it work—delightful!) and *Birds of Fire* were other favorites that are reminiscent of an Ellison influence.

Borkowski's artwork for *Tincture* strikes bold and true, complimenting the strong build-up for the conclusion. Your cover and inside front covers are works of art. I wondered how you achieved that effect on the inside front cover? Where is that terrifying chair, anyway? (P.S. note that "The Screaming Chair's Sister" was taken by H. E. Foss of Chicago. I suspect the chair resides in his attic.—*Ye Ed!*)

Gerberding, Ostler and Standish contributed more gems, again variety with attention to impact. What a pleasure to appreciate.

I hope you can continue to find such excellent material—you've had no problem with that, obviously!

Harry E. Foss
Oak Park, IL

ISSUE #12 WAS quite good and I dug the cover photo special. It's always good when you can find objects which in themselves have that look of partaking of the outside. The writing throughout was impressive. *New Order* was a weird kink and *Tincture* made my urban paranoia a witch. For sheer brevity and strangeness, though, *Little Lucas* was my favorite. Just the thing to tell my

nephews as a bedtime story. Gerberding's illustration was also excellent. Was also pleased with the display of my work. Excellent job by Precision Typographers.

Robert Baldwin
La Canada, CA

IT NEVER FEELS guilty again after reading DEATHREALM #12 and seeing its consequences in Rick Kleefel's creepy crawlly *Embarrassment & Revenge*. This was a smooth flowing, gripping tale with a slick ending and interesting characters. Great story for the number one slot.

Tincture by Roger Kyle-Keith was a nice slice of everyday big-city life and its senseless violence, in a realistic setting. It was a bit of a challenge sorting the many characters at first, but well worth the effort.

The other two I especially enjoyed were Gary Phillips' internal tale of terror *Birds of Fire* and Andrea Locke & Friend's *New Order*, the tale of a man suddenly obsessed with cleansing the city of "bad bacteria." Strange things happen when you walk around Chicago, even after the rain has passed, without an umbrella. Nice tale, Mark.

From the graffiti cake cover to the inside-out, twirling, fanged, meat-eating, gnarly, pus-sack-decimation on the back cover, you were thoroughly successful in grossing me out and affording me several hours of great reading. I still think Jeff needs to seek some professional help.

My thanks comes in the form of a check for the renewal of my subscription. Keep knockin' us dead, Mark.

Tim Walkers
Muskogee, OK

THE STORY BY Rick Kleefel (*Embarrassment & Revenge*) has an interesting concept, guilt manifesting itself in physical symptoms. If guilt comes out that ugly, I would hate to see how envy or jealousy would

show up.

The tale was rather nauseating. I do not care for gore used just for the sake of gore. That is what has ruined the genre, particularly in films. But if something disastrous is essential to the plot, rather than just for shock factor, that is quite different.

Kleefel effectively constructs a story where you have some empathy for the protagonist; therefore the "gross out" is much more effective. If you have no feeling for a character, then he can vomit live worms for pages, all to no avail. (Jung goes to cover a poor plot by an untalented writer is as ineffective as Jimi Hendrix attempts to cover worm-producing wound with a napkin.)

I found the Kleefel tale to be a fine piece of work, though I thought the ending left something to be desired.

Wilum H. Pugmire
Seattle, WA

DEATHREALM #12, AS always, is superb. That cover is so wonderful, it makes me want to sit down and write a story about it. That chilling demonic face, the blend of shades, the simple yet sinister aspect of it really got to me.

Rick Kleefel's story is the kind of twisted, grotesque and amusing sort of story I now expect to find in DEATHREALM. As the story flows, the events are so ouvre and fascinating that you just keep reading, enthralled, until you reach the end, an end that is in itself a beginning to yet greater horrors, ones that you contemplate. This helps the story to linger in one's mind.

Tincture, alas, did nothing for me. I can tell that it is well done, but the story failed to catch my fancy. *Birds of Fire* had a nice Lovecraftian feel to it. Little Lucas was utterly bizarre and endearing.

New Order was my favorite story this issue. It has a lot of meat, and is extremely odd and imaginative. I like how it begins, with its air of subtle mystery, and how it proceeds to get more and more strange. Then, when Geoffrey thrusts the nails into his chest and head, it is utterly shocking. The story is filled with excellent descriptions, everything is realized and comes

I was surprised that Edelman's story did not catch my interest. For some reason, it seems to meander along without coming alive.

The art is very good, especially the

backcover and page 38.

Ronald Kelly
Pegram, TN

REALLY DID ENJOY DEATHREALM #12. As usual, the fiction, art and poetry was first rate, as well as the magazine and book-review columns. For the news about *DEATHREALM*'s price increase to \$4.00, I say "So what?" *DEATHREALM* has offered superior quality work between two covers for a very modest price for nearly four years now. I figure it's only right that we start paying a fair price for all the enjoyment editor Rainey deserves upon his readership on a regular basis (just receiving an issue of small press magazine that comes out precisely when it is supposed to is worth an extra fifty cents to me). ((Well, not quite precisely....I hope the rest of my readers are as supportive.—*Ye Ed!*))

Rick Kleefel's *Embarrassment & Revenge* was an extremely disturbing story with an Ostler-type feel to it. Not the kind of story you would want to read before a big meal. Unfortunately, I did and guess what was on the menu that night—spaghetti! Afterwards, I didn't know whether to reach for the Alka-Seltzer or the Hart's dog de-wormer. *Birds of Fire* was a well-written story. Phillips really did a great job with it. Edelman's *True Love*...was an interesting take with a little black humor thrown in for good measure. And I got a kick out of McKenzie's *Little Lucas*, too. It had a nice Southern air to it and was very effective for its length.

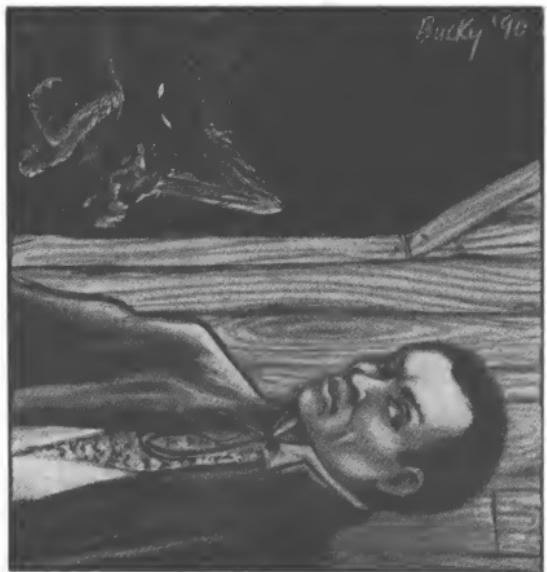
It's nice to see more writers using Southern settings for their fiction these days (something that I personally can't get enough of). I suppose my favorite story of the issue would have been *New Order* by the team of Locke and Rainey. Unlike most horror stories, which end on a fatalistic note, this social possessed a strong sense of hope and social responsibility, which was refreshing.

(Continued on page 56)

Y E L E T T R E C O L U M N E

O H , S O R D I D S H A M E !

RONALD KELLY



Bucky '96

BY THE VERY nature and eloquence of this writing, few would believe that I was once a man enslaved.

That fact alone may cause some men to dismiss the validity of my story entirely; their suspicion of the negro race conqueror's potential for open-mindedness. But the tale that this testament holds is truth, I swear by God that it is. Surely it might have remained untold for all time—and perhaps itss so—but a dying man must purge his troubled soul. Therefore I take pen in hand and cleanse my own of the stain of that horrid incident some sixty years ago.

I first came to know the name of Bellamere in the mid-1800's. Since my birth I had been bond body, mind, and soul to the

possession of another man...in fact, several times over a twenty-five year period. When gold had once again exchanged hands and I was bought by the family of Bellamere, I was a husband and father. Fortunately, the older Bellamere was a man of compassion and not one to break up the family unit, putting so much faith and stock in his own. So, without ceremony, the three of us, my wife Camilla, my son Jeremiah, and I, were delivered to the Bellamere estate. We arrived tattered, tattered, tattered.

Catherine and Miss Emily, while I often went hunting with Master Sebastian and his eldest son, Collin. And the Bellamere's youngest child, Martin, was my son's bosom buddy. He and Jeremiah made the whole of the Bellamere estate their private playground; climbing trees, skydiving in the fish pond, and playing their favorite game, marbles, in the earthen circle drawn

for that purpose beneath one of the garden's great, spreading magnolia trees.

So what went wrong? Why were we not allowed to live out the remainder of our

lives in such paradise, void of prejudice without conflict? There were no chains, no bullwhips, and never once did we hear the word "nigger" cross our master's lips. Since the Bellameres' wealth was one of inheritance rather than livelihood produced by cotton or sugar cane, the extent of the plantation and its grounds were simply there for the family's comfort and leisure. I was dressed in the finest of garments, taught the most impeccable of manners, and transformed from an ignorant field手, hard into a poised and proper butler. Camilla attended to the cooking and housework, while Jeremiah, then a small boy, took care of the stables.

Another benefit of serving the Bellameres was their uncustomary interest in our education, or rather our lack of it. Sebastian Bellamere and his wife, Catherine, possessed an immense library of both ancient and current volumes. All manner of books and periodicals were made available to us. While my former masters had deliberately kept my family and I in intellectual darkness—a common practice in the South during that period, generated more out of fear than hatred—the Bellamere clan seemed to encourage our pursuit of knowledge. The Bellameres' only daughter, Emily, had hopes of becoming a school teacher someday and we were her first pupils. We became well versed in the classics, reading Dickens, Shelly, and Keats, and studying the histories and philosophies of the world. I would not be penning this testament thus very evening if Miss Emily's tutorial guidance had not left such a lasting impression.

And we were offered companionship as well. Camilla shared activities with Lady Catherine and Miss Emily, while I often went hunting with Master Sebastian and his eldest son, Collin. And the Bellamere's youngest child, Martin, was my son's bosom buddy. He and Jeremiah made the whole of the Bellamere estate their private playground; climbing trees, skydiving in the fish pond, and playing their favorite game, marbles, in the earthen circle drawn

under the shadow of some great scandal. Sometimes, when partaking of strong drink, Sebastian would slip and mention "exile" and some terrible "shame" that had forever tarnished the family name. He never elaborated on precisely what that shame was, only that it had taken place during wartime. My suspicion was that cowardice was the black mark of which he spoke, since Sebastian and his family were of an overly reductive and gentle nature. They had very little to do with the neighboring planters and whatever business was done in Vicksburg was performed by myself, Collin and Emily had no interest in people's own age and never attended any of the dances or social functions prevalent during those days of antebellum grace. And young Martin shunned the neighboring children, finding companionship only in the company of my son.

The only other clue I had to the family's mysterious background was something I discovered in the Bellamere library. It was a journal belonging to one Woodrow Bellamere, grandfather to my master Sebastian.

Woodrow had been a man of medicine. He had been most interested in the workings of the human mind and the cultural influences that caused negative behavior, such as paranoia, anxiety, and, as in the case of his own heritage, fear and timidity. It was known that the doctor had developed a serum to purge future generations of such weaknesses. A few of the passages even

hinted that Woodrow might have tested the concoction on himself. But from what had witnessed of the Bellamere legacy, Woodrow's pursuit for genetic strength and stability had proven a dismal failure.

However, he did not allow their eccentricities to affect me. I respected the privacy they demanded, and attended to my appointed duties. Camilla and Jeremiah were the same. For a while, things went pleasantly. Then a couple of incidents took place that were both puzzling and frightening to someone familiar with the mild nature of such people.

The first concerned Sebastian Bellamere himself. He and his wife rarely exchanged hostile words; rather, they seemed most loving and considerate of one another. Yet, one evening their customary civility gave way to a heated argument. It concerned Catherine's desire to enrol Emily in a finishing school in Vicksburg, and Sebastian's absolute refusal to allow the girl to venture from the solitude of the Bellamere household. The more Catherine pressed the matter, the angrier Sebastian became. His agitation was disturbing, but it was an emotion I had never seen grip the man before, watched from the open door of his parlor as Sebastian's face grew deathly pale. And there was something else. His eyes—the whites of his eyes had grown blood red. Not bloodshot like those of a drunken man, but pure blood red, only the pupils showing in contrast to the surrounding crimson orbs.

Sebastian took a trembling step toward the lady, his hand aloft and balled into a fist. I am certain he would have struck her if I had not stepped into the room and drawn his attention. The man turned and regarded me with a fury that could only be described as murderous. At first, I thought he might take his anger out on me, but instead he stormed past, heading down stairs to the wine cellar. I followed at his urgent request and, soon, he and I were alone in the basement. There was an empty storage room at the rear of the dusty bottle racks, one with a sturdy oaken door and iron lock. He instructed me to lock him within the windowless cell and not come to release him until early the next morning.

Then came the conflict between abolitionists and slaveowners. The Southern States seceded from the Union, the Confederacy was born, and the great Civil War tore the fabric of normal existence asunder.

Men of all ages and social distinction enlisted to fight the Yankee hordes that were

overcome with fear and trembling. He was put to bed immediately. He developed a high fever the following day, but it did not seem to be from any form of sickness.

Rather, it appeared that Martin was in the throes of some bizarre mental tantrum, as if his initial fear had bled away into a creeping rage.

Later that night, while the household slept, young Martin left his bed. Lady Catherine discovered his absence and alerted her husband. On horseback, Sebastian, Collin and I searched the expanse of the estate, but found nothing. Then instinct niggled at me and I suggested we ride to the pasture where the bull had chased the two boys. As the dawn came, we reached the field and found the child laying in the dewy clover, his right side torn and stained with blood. As father and brother carried the sleeping boy home, I lingered, wondering what had become of the mean-spirited bull. A short time later, I found out. The bull was sprawled in the wooded hollow, cold and dead. Its belly had been torn open and its entrails scattered throughout the brambled thicket....

...The bull was sprawled in the wooded hollow, cold and dead. Its belly had been torn open and its entrails scattered throughout the brambled thicket....

The soldiers dismounted and marched boldly to the mansion's front door. There is no one here but a few frightened women and children and a couple of cavalrymen invaded

the Bellamere men, however, did not. They

were remaining neutral and refrained from the resistance.

The men had been locked in with the women and children were secured in the mansion's upper level. I watched from the upstairs window as a group of cavalrymen invaded

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some lower level. From the shadowy depths of the wine cellar.

Then came the most horrifying wail of pure rage that I had ever heard in my life.

It was fury born between the mortal soul of man and the raw bloodlust of the most primal of beasts. It barreled up out of the pit of the mansion's black bowels, demanding to be vented, filling all who heard it with a fear so strong that it was paralyzing as the venom of some exotic and deadly snake.

I turned and saw Emily and Martin then. Their faces were as pale as lard, their expressions contorted into a rictus of intense mental anguish. And their eyes... their eyes were the same shade of brilliant crimson as that which their father had exhibited that night so many years ago.

"I can't hold them any longer!" gasped Catherine, her slender arms surrendering the two struggling children. Emily and Martin ran for the door, their faces like those of demons, their hands curled into pale, fleshless claws. I moved to stop them, but the woman's voice cried out, "Let them go! Let them go or they will tear you apart!"

I stepped aside and they hit the door with such force that the lock was torn loose from its moorings. With ragged walls that more resembled the fittful wrappings of beasts than that of innocent children, they disappeared into the star-case to join in the conflict below.

And what a conflict it was. There came another crack and splinter of wood, again from the inside. There was the sound of the locked door being torn from its hinges and tossed aside. And here were screams. Lord in Heaven help me, I can still hear those awful screams of fear and torment shrilling the night air, climbing higher and higher, pushing the limits of the human vocal cords, then faltering into choking silence. Only a few gunshots rang out and there was the clatter of hooves on the flagstones as a few of the horses escaped into the summer darkness. After the screams of dying men raged, all that could be heard was the maddening sound of flesh being ripped apart. That and the wailing chorus of earthbound banshees

performing acrobatics in the outer courtyard.

After a time, the horrible noises ended. "Wait here," Catherine Bellamere said, then, despite my protests, went downstairs alone.

My family and I waited in the upstairs parlor, straining our ears. All that we could hear was the lady's gentle soothing voice and the sound of soft sobbing.

Minutes later, Catherine reappeared. Her gown was stained crimson with blood. Quietly, she avoided our questions and went to an iron safe in her husband's adjoining study. She opened the safe and withdrew a small bag of gold coins and a folded document. "Come with me," she said and the four of us went down to the ground floor of the Bellamere house.

The marble floor was splattered with streaks of fresh blood, leading from the darkness of the courtyard beyond. "Stay here for a moment," Catherine requested. Her voice was rock steady, despite the carriage all around her. As she slipped through the door of the downstairs sitting room, I caught a fleeting glimpse of huddled forms in the golden glow of a kerosene lamp. They were the forms of monsters, hideous fiends clad in blood-dyed rags.

As the door swung closed, I watched as one of them looked my way, its eyes running the gamut from crimson to pink to eggshell white.

It was a demon I knew. A demon that possessed a familiar face, as well as a familiar voice. "Oh, what shame!" it moaned tearfully. "What sorrid shame!"

A moment later, Lady Catherine exited the den. She handed me the gold sack and the folded paper. "Here is money and your freedom. Take a buggy and two strong horses from the stable and go. Never return to this house again, and for God's sake, never utter a word of what took place here this night."

Confused, we did as she said. We left the house and stood for a long and horrified instant in the courtyard beyond the labas-te columns of the Bellamere mansion. In the pale glow of moonlight we laid eyes on the massacre that the Bellamere's secret shame had brought about. Soldiers and horses lay everywhere, torn and broken,

like huge toys mangled by some vicious giant-child and cast aside. Fresh blood glistened in the nocturnal light, as well as trapped firmly behind my lips. Sometimes the stark whiteness of decimated bone. As I quickly led my family past the awful scene of human devastation, I noticed that some of the bodies appeared to have been partially devoured.

As we made our way through the garden for the stable, the titter of childish laughter erupted from beneath the sprawling magnolia tree. "Jeremiah," called young Martin from the shadows. "Come play with me."

My son took a step toward the tree, but I pulled him back. Moonlight shone upon the dirt circle where the Bellamere child crouched. His marble game was different that night from the countless times I had witnessed before. For instead of the colorful balls of glass, onyx, and agate, Martin shot the circle with huge black orbs that seemed slick and shiny in appearance. It took me a moment before I realized that we had played with the gouged eyes of a cavalryman's horse.

We hitched two of the stable's finest steeds to a wagon and left that horrible place, escaping the Federal soldiers by way of a desolate back-road. Although I have never spoken of that horrible night before this writing, I have thought about it many times. I have revisited the Bellamere plantation many times in my dreams, have heard the bestial screams of bloodlust and smelled

the coppery scent of violent death in my nostrils. And I always wake with a scream gripped firmly behind my lips. Sometimes that scream escapes, like steam escaping from a boiler, saving my mind from the mounting pressure of certain insanity.

I am an old man now. I have lived past the conquering of the West, past the turn of the century, and now into the time of the Great War. I have watched the world progress before my aged eyes, have seen people live and die, including my own family. And I have watched for word regarding a particular surname. That search has ended with story from a recent newspaper, a report about a soldier by the name of Bellamere who was court-martialed for crimes unspeakable, even by the conventions of war. I cannot help but wonder if that poor soldier is a distant offspring of the family I once knew and if he is damned with the same seed of shame that his ancestors were.

I lay here now, bedridden and ill, my frail hands unfolding a document yellowed and crumpling with age. It is the declaration of my freedom given to me some sixty years ago, my own private Emancipation Proclamation.

As I stare at the hastily scrawled signature at the bottom of the page, my heart grows heavy with uneasiness. For the name of Sebastian Bellamere is signed not in simple ink, but in the blood of a dozen slaughtered souls.

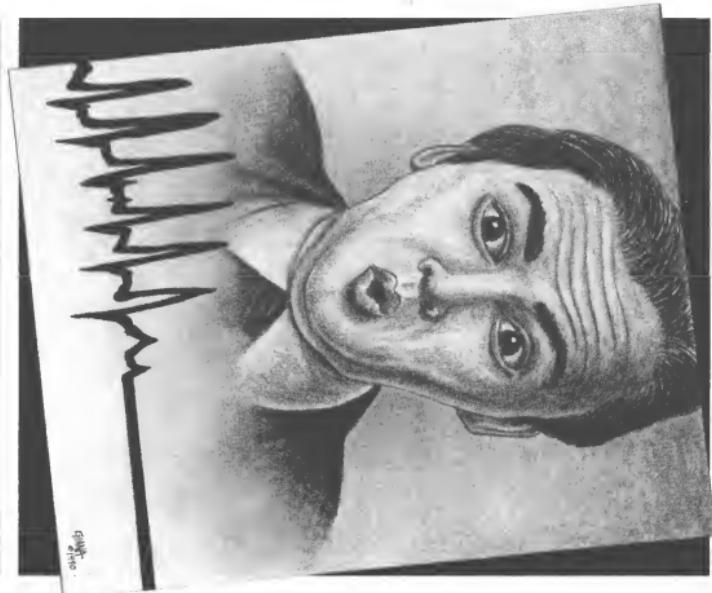
WEIRD ROMANCE

FROM THE FOLKS WHICH THE GALL TO GIVE YOU UNDEADLY WEIRD SMUT COMICS AS BIG-BAD MAG BY THE VORST PRO AND SMALL PRESS READ TABUUM TERRAINT'S ATTEMPT TO RESCUE HER TWIN LADY FROM THE VILE CULTURES OF SHEIK ABUDULLAH NGALGALAH.

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WILLIAM R. TROTTER



A PINCH OF SNUFF

BY WILLIAM R. TROTTER

iscretion is ever the key, thought Reverend Billy Wayne Sedberry as he scrutinized a row of rental cars behind the Hertz agency at Dulles International Airport. He chose a one-tone dark green Chevrolet; so anonymous-looking that it might well have come from some bureaucratic motor pool. Fifteen minutes later, under the ashes-of-roses sky

of a late winter twilight, he joined in the faster in-bound lane of Freeway traffic.

As always, the sight of Washington's architecture awaked in him sympathetic vibrations of power; he was a man, after all, who had breakfasted with a president and lunched with more Senators and Congressmen than he could remember: those clean, massive geometries of granite and concrete,

nestled in their webs of rampway and and strategically-plotted shrubs, strobe-lit by the first sputtering ignition of streetlights. He also admitted, from the relative comfort of his inbound lane, the dense electric necklaces of outbound headlights, the quick hard gleam of wet pavement in front of columned facades.

More than one of his advisors had urged him not to leave at this time. The Memorial Day weekend opening of his 2,000-acre family campground and full-gospel bush-reservoir's conference center, "The Pastures of His Peace," was only nine weeks off, and there were problems. Half of the hotel carpeting hadn't arrived yet, the fireworks contractor was trying to gouge him because his liability premium had just been raised, and some snoot-nosed columnist had already dubbed the state's largest paper had already dubbed the park "Six Flags O'er Jesus."

Maybe he should have stayed at the office to handle details, but that was what well-paid subordinates were for, wasn't it? The pressures of daily video taping were compounded than they ever had been, and the stakes were higher. He needed a trip to Washington, needed the release. If Mr. Sturdivant had not called him, Billy Wayne would have called Mr. Sturdivant.

But Sturdivant had called, and his terse, business-like message—"I have something new. Something I think will interest you greatly"—had started the blood hammering in Sedberry's ears.

He left the main streets behind and threaded his way through a labyrinth of elegant Georgetown lanes, slowing finally in order to pass through the narrow arch of a colonnaded porte-cochere, into a cobblestone and secluded courtyard. As soon as he had cleared the entrance, a black stretch limo with tinted windows nosed toward the opposite direction. Before the rear bumper passed into shadow, he noticed diplomatic plates—whose, he could not tell. It was

something he had breakfasted with a president and lunched with more Senators and Congressmen than he could remember: those clean, massive geometries of granite and concrete,

Inside the confines of the courtyard, the Chevrolet's motor sounded surprisingly raucous. He quickly shut off the engine, retrieved his weekend suitcase from the back seat, then climbed out and just stood, nervous and expectant, staring at the shuttered windows and ornately-scarred entrance of a large townhouse. After a moment, he knew the door would open; it always did. He did not know if there were hidden TV cameras trained on the courtyard or if some other unobtrusive surveillance method was employed, but he did know that his host never left him standing there long enough to become truly uncomfortable, just long enough to remind him of the priorities of their relationship.

The door opened. Mr. Sturdivant, as usual, was attired in a three-piece suit of conservative style and costly material. With his chally smile, intelligent yet sadistic eyes, and vaguely Continental accent, he looked not unlike the *maitre d'* of an overpriced but genuinely classy restaurant. Now that Sedberry thought of it, that analogy had some element of truth. Sturdivant's operation had class, and it certainly was expensive. Were Sturdivant's services overpriced? Sedberry tended to think not; that which is unique cannot be measured by the yardsticks one uses to measure value-given in ordinary transactions.

"Welcome, Mr. Sedberry," Sturdivant crooned, extending a long cool hand. It was a measure of Sturdivant's subtlety that he always referred to his client as "Mister" rather than "Reverend," an acknowledgement, tacitly made, of the fact that Sedberry was here as a man, not as a religious leader.

Except for that first time they met, when Sturdivant had come up to Sedberry at the door to the committee checkroom, His gaze had been both understanding and piercingly intimate. He grasped Sedberry's arm and said: "I watched you, Reverend Sedberry. I saw into your heart. You need not feel any shame. I assure you, there are other men who feel as you do—men of power and stature. I can serve your needs, as I serve theirs, with the utmost discretion." Then, observing that several members of the press had drifted into earshot, Sturdivant flashed

a confidential smile and vanished into the crowd.

Sedberry was always reminded of that first conversation, each time Sturdivant ushered him into the townhouse's elegantly decorated interior. In a richly paneled living room, patterned after a Georgian men's club, Sturdivant took Sedberry's coat, poured him a drink, and pushed a hidden button which caused the room to be filled with soft music of precisely the kind Sedberry chose to listen to in the privacy of his own home. How had Sturdivant known that? From the beginning, he had known, that was all. In his three decades as a minister, Sedberry had known many charlatans who pretended to powers they did not possess; he had also known a few, a rare and powerful few, who truly had the gift of being able to read a man's soul from the briefest outward signs. Sturdivant's powers of observation, in this regard, were the keenest Sedberry had ever encountered.

"You said you had something special for me."

"Indeed I have," replied Sturdivant in his silkiest voice. "Something I had thought was lost forever, an item of the utmost historical significance, of truly special resonance—one of Sturdivant's favorite words, and one which he used only to describe something extraordinary."

"It was located by an agent of mine in Paraguay."

Sedberry put his drink on the marble-topped coffee table, lest the glass slip from his trembling hands. "You can't mean...not 'The Conspirators'?"

Sturdivant nodded, permitting himself the luxury of an enthusiastic gesture. "Actually, I've had it for several weeks, but the original print was quite fragile and there was considerable restoration work to be done before it could be viewed. Naturally, what you'll be seeing today is a video copy. And naturally, too, there was considerable expense involved in the restoration, not to mention the procurement itself. A number of cash payments to various Paraguayan officials, for instance."

"Yes, yes. I understand. I told you price was never an object with me."

"Quite." Sturdivant took a piece of folded print-out paper from his coat pocket and handed it to Sedberry with a discreet clearing of his throat. Sedberry tried to keep his face immobile as he read the figures, but his eyebrows betrayed him.

"This is a great deal of money."

"I have other clients, Mr. Sedberry, who would gladly pay twice that amount for a chance to experience this material."

Swallowing hard, Sedberry opened his briefcase and counted out a stack of unmarked envelopes, each filled with cash.

"Count it if you like," he said, tossing the money to Sturdivant with a nonchalance he did not feel.

"Our relationship has always been one of mutual trust, Mr. Sedberry. It's not necessary for me to count the contents." Sturdivant placed the envelopes in a large safe. "Can I offer you another drink, or shall we proceed to the main order of business?"

"Let's not waste any more time."

Sedberry knew it was going to take some fancy financial footwork to cover this expenditure. He had stretched his financial resources very thin in order to construct his rural fiefdom, and just at the point of maximum commitment, he had begun to sense a sea-change in the national mood; slight but significant signs that the gravity of his ministry were becoming history.

The nation as a whole had stopped its march to the right; the administration whose agenda and tone had created a fertile nation-al setting for men such as Billy Wayne Sedberry, had suffered a serious, sudden decline in popularity. There was talk not only of lame ducks, but of dead ones, too. The pendulum had not yet begun to swing in the opposite direction—if there was still a grace period, a window, during which he could regain his financial stability—it was clearly poised in the half-state of equilibrium that precedes a new direction.

Viewer demographics had stopped growing six months ago and were starting to sag just a little bit—the audience for his brand of phosphor-dot evangelism had proven not only finite but exhaustible as well. Only the

bigger, slicker, capital-heavy ministries were still making a go of it—and as the size of the total pie began to dwindle, the kravies being used to slice it had grown stamp

ing, among the brethren, and surely there would be more, and bloodier, to come. The

circus tent circuit in the boondocks. Sedberry had been here—he remembered the mingled smell of tobacco juice, sawdust and unwashed farmers—and he had no intention of ever going back. There were parcels of land, on the fringe of his development, that he could sell to some condo-hucksters; it would take some finagling to pull it off, but that's what he paid his accountants for.

Held just here to cut some more corners for the ministry's helm for eight weeks.

Sedberry's personal sex life was tinctured only by sporadic and rather ordinary sins, and even his sins were committed in the missionary position. His marriage was out-

wardly a model of Christian decorum, but any negative effects of being absent from

the ministry's helm for eight weeks.

Sedberry's personal sex life was tinctured only by sporadic and rather ordinary sins, and even his sins were committed in the missionary position. His marriage was out-

...Like a narwhal's horn breaking through ice, a thin steel blade pierced the apex of the young man's collarbone...his mouth twisted in a stuttering rictus, in a bone-snapping paroxysm of pleasure/pain...

separate bedroom for the last eleven years. When glandular pressures built up to an intolerable degree, Sedberry disguised himself and sought the company of prostitutes. The experiences served a dual purpose for him: on the one hand, the pressure was relieved, and on the other hand the disgust he felt was usually so intense that no new pressures began building for months afterwards. He returned from these periodic lapses with his anti-pornography seal renewed and with a gleaming, rhetorical edge to his sermons and prayers. There were other men in his line of work—he could name fifteen at least—who fell from grace more often and much more exotically.

As a veteran anti-obscenity crusader, Sedberry had already seen most of what that genre had to offer. As the Commission sat for longer and longer hours, its focus grew dimmer and its morale suffering from the slide condescension of the liberal

press, he had started to grow weary of the endless parade of dildos, rubber corsets, and hypertrophic organs. By this point in the hearings' final week, both revolution and titillation had been replaced by numbness. On that day, as they were entering the committee chamber, the Chairperson — a Congregationalist from a conservative enclave in the Midwest — had jokingly slapped Sedberry on the shoulder and remarked: "Well, today's the day we investigate the UFOs of pornography."

"I don't think I follow you...." Sedberry had mumbled, dallying agendas having grown rather vague in his mind.

"Snuff movies. They're called the 'UFOs of porn' because everybody's *keen* about them, but nobody can come up with an authentic specimen of one."

The day's exhibits were introduced and commented upon by a brillo-haired radical feminist who used the occasion to launch into an ideological tirade filled with references to such things as "phallocentric power peregrinations" and "the tyranny of anatomical accident." As he began to nod off, Sedberry heard the Chairperson whisper sotto voce, "How the hell can one have anatomically correct politics?"

At some point during the drowsing recitation, the exhibits were projected. First came some lurid grand guignol scenes from movies of the *Bloodsucking Freaks* ilk — nothing new there — and after that a grainy stretch of film, ostensibly from Thailand, that purported to show a genuine snuff scene but was so riddled with bad splices that no coherent idea of its contents could be formed. Then came something else entirely. It was in clear focus, well-lit, in waxy-hued video color: a lithe, muscular young man, androgynously beautiful, with creamy olive skin and clear black third-world eyes, chained, spread-eagled against a wall of black varnished marble. The lustre of his skin to stone framed the color of his skin to perfection. In front of him, kneeling with her back to the camera, was a svelte blonde woman; from her motions, and from the expressions on the young man's face, it was clear what was going on. Heavy breathing

and moist rhythmic noises from the sound-track caused the ideologue's white to fade from hearing. Obviously, the young man's sexual crisis was imminent. And his contortions became more rhythmic and his groans louder, the camera smoothly panned in until only the head and upper torso, glowing faintly with an even coat of perspiration, were visible. The young man took a deep breath and opened his mouth to belch his pleasure. At that exact instant, like a newborn's horn breaking through ice, a thin steel blade pierced the apex of his collarbone. The expression on the young man's face underwent a profound change: at first wracked with pleasure, then he registered the agony of penetration, the two sensations blentled, a hundred violent emotions flashed across the sculpted planes of his face, his mouth twisted in a stuttering狂笑, spewing gruff noises of brute emotion, his deep pooled eyes flashed like pinwheels as he finished in a bone-snapping paroxysm of pleasure/pain, then seemed slowly to glass-over and lose sentience.

Sedberry realized he had clutched the table, white-knuckled. He was grateful that the low level of lighting prevented anyone from observing that he had an erection fit to beat down a door. He felt his throat turn sandy-paper, his sweat pooling in the valleys of his lap. Nothing he had seen in any of the exhibits had evoked in him a tangible erotic response. Disgust, surprise, even at times a kind of shameful amusement; all these things, yes. But now, confronted with the actual moment of death coming in unholy union with the moment of supreme physical ecstasy — a spectacle that real or staged had turned his stomach, whether real or staged — he found himself on the trembling verge of a spontaneous emission. Stunned, he turned his eyes away and began to breathe deeply. By the time the lights came on again, only the grisly dissection of his face betrayed the sum of his emotions. And only one person in the room — Sturdivant — had correctly interpreted it. That night, in the hotel room, Sedberry learned what that interpretation was.

It was true. Sturdivant had begun by say-

ing, that every man had a price and every man had a vice; more precisely, an image or an object or a situation which instantly triggers an erotic response too powerful to be ignored or resisted. Sedberry knew it was the latter. Sedberry knew it was the most不堪的 moment of his life, and death remained, to be sure, but he did not know what useless to pretend he did not know what Sturdivant was talking about. Sturdivant had seen him, seen through him. He knew. And that first night, patiently, in the kindest manner possible, he explained.

Thanatopics, he called them — persons for whom the instant of death held a powerful erotic lure. The condition was not something that world lump is practiced more common than you might suppose. He assured Sedberry, among persons of power and wealth: generals, executives, political parties, worshipped exotic footwear, or begged to be urinated-upon. On the contrary, the cultural and spiritual pedigree of this particular fetish was quite distinguished. What, traditionally, were the two greatest subjects of art and literature? Love and death. The kinship between orgasm and death had long been a respectable literary conceit: the Greeks had written about it, so had the Romans, and the Elizabethans had gone so far as to describe the sexual climax as "The Little Death." Really, when you looked back at the history of western culture, it was in no way strange that, for certain individuals whose sensibilities were attuned to it, the kinship between those unloved states-of-being should be both deep and inextricable.

The incidence of this particular sexual obsession, Sturdivant continued, had risen steadily as the twentieth century had progressed. Violent death, after all, was one of our century's most salient facts. And technology had made the very instant of death an observable, repeatable phenomenon. At that point, Sturdivant had even waxed a bit philosophical: "With still cameras, only a thin discontinuous slice of the experience could be captured — the process itself remained elusive to the photographer. It was like trying to obtain the value of pi on your

calculator — you can carry it out to more and more decimal places and get closer and closer to the essence without ever pinning it down precisely. The exact microsecond transition between life and death remained, which can be conjured, amplified, refined, and released, by means of my presentations."

Even visible, so that they could be studied. Even savoried. For my clients, these thanatopatic experiences are transcendent sex. Of course, sexual release is a part of it; just as it is a part of life itself, but the full spectrum of emotions which can be experienced, amplified, refined, and released, by means of my presentations — partake of the mingled essences of life and death. They are designed to provoke not merely a physical spasm, but a total, consummate soul-and-body catharsis.

He, Sturdivant, was a specialist, a dedicated broker between these rare and illicit phenomena and a select number of individuals — men and even a few women, he hinted, who were mature enough, sophisticated enough, to appreciate the quality, thoroughness, and subtle attention to detail which characterized his services. Naturally, such services bore a price tag commensurate with their erotic nature, but also discretion was included in the price. Nothing would kill his business faster than indiscretion, and Sturdivant was first and foremost a businessman. If Mr. Sedberry — the "Reverend" had already been discarded — would care to join him tomorrow night, the first experience would be, so to speak, on the house; he preferred a card with the Georgetown address on it. The event would be only the slightest taste of the refinements, with the truly exquisite nuances, that could be offered for Sedberry in the future.

The elevator stopped and its doors opened silently. Sedberry followed his host down a short corridor then through the unmarked door that led to the theatre. The door could be locked from inside — one more assurance of privacy. "Please go in an take your seat. The presentation will last approximately

eighty minutes." Sturdivant bowed and closed the door. Once inside, Sedberry took his favorite seat: a comfortable, contoured chair with outsized armrests. There were other seats behind and on either side of this one, but they were always folded and covered with cloth. Sturdivant had once intimated that there were group audiences, sometimes but beyond that he would not elaborate. He was, as advertised, the very embodiment of discretion.

As Sturdivant had predicted, their relationship had flourished. The first few times Sedberry had come to Washington, the "presentations" had been videos of such structured great care was taken in such matters as comfort and privacy. Sturdivant's attention to erotic detail was equally artistic and equally discreet: at some point during each "thanatopsis," a tall, pale, dark-haired woman with full-lipped sensual features would slowly materialize from the darkness close to Sedberry's seat. He always perfect and her manipulations always added a delicious frisson of sensuality to what was already an experience of soul-shaking intensity. Her fingers were incredibly adept at tracing the flicker of nerve-end currents; her mouth was always cool at the start, then it seemed to take heat from him and pass it back-refined and sweetened, in a perfect loop. She never spoke a word, never betrayed a single vulgar symptom of subjective emotion. She could have been any woman or every woman, for that matter, a disembodied succubus. Her first appearance had been disconcerting, but—as Sturdivant had predicted, when Sedberry brought the matter up—the soon became an inseparable part of the entire ritual. Sturdivant refused to divulge her name; Sedberry, privately, came to think of her as

the Dark Angel. Around him, the theater darkened. From hidden speakers came the sound of Wagner—the ceremonial grandeur of *Parsifal*. The screen filled with light; Sedberry could now see his own lower body, a small oblong floor around his seat—otherwise, the room had become incorporeal. Like Death itself, it turned into a realm outside of space and time. The sensation of being wined-into the images was hypnotic. In his own way, Sturdivant was an artist.

Now there were men on the screen, stern, Prussian visages. Iron Crosses glittering at their throats, their uniforms creases aglow with badges and ribbons. Teutonic warriors. Aristocrats. As Sedberry studied and became familiar with their faces, the narrator's voice began to override the music: warm, Welllesian, intimate yet authoritative, sonorous and ingratiating—a voice in a thousand. Sedberry wondered very briefly, for the mood of the ritual was coming over him now like a cloud of incense—if this narrator had any idea what his scripts were used for.

"Look into the eyes of these men, these cultured, virile faces. These are the men who tried to assassinate Adolf Hitler. These are men who, but for an accident, would have changed the history of the world..." After Sedberry's fourth trip to Washington—the visits were now monthly—his host had introduced him to a more subtle and sophisticated level of experience: not to mention a geometrical increase in his fee. Sedberry was not unprepared for Sturdivant had mentioned the next level: several sessions in their post-presentation discussions over brandy, in the living room. These sessions, he was told, were necessary to avoid any shock. Sedberry might feel in going straight from the theater into the streets, a transition that could lead, in higher content of music, than others. A video tape of a wine-soaked derelict expiring after being struck by a truck contained no mystery, no subtlety, no significance. It might provide a quick, crude fix, nothing more but the carefully observed death of a great artist, a historical figure, an individual of power and importance—from sharing those experiences, the witness gained not only release, but a portion of wisdom; to use a crude analogy, it was like the difference between spending ten solid minutes with a common streetwalker and a perfect virgin.

The thanatopic experience could be experienced a hundredfold, he said, by being particularized. Just as conventional sex was a rule, deeper and more rewarding if shared with a partner one knew intimately, so was the contemplation of Death made

richer, subtler, more intense, if a mood of intimacy could be established with the victim. It was possible, Sturdivant assured him, to "know" the subject in something very close to the Biblical sense—if the presentation were handled with sufficient sensitivity.

The promise of even greater erotic release lured Sedberry into agreement, although he confessed to Sturdivant that he did not fully grasp the concepts they had been discussing. "Nothing bestows understanding more than experience," Sturdivant had promised. "I'll select your first partner very carefully." That was how Sedberry had learned that certain deaths carry greater resonance, a

aesthetic responses he had not known he possessed.

Certain memories from that time stood out even now as pinnacles of experience. There had been the profound experience of confronting the death, by garrotte at the hands of Franco's torturers, of the left-wing Spanish poet Luis de Roivara. The event had been filmed in the whitewashed chambers of a political jail in Salamanca, in the summer of 1938. The components of the presentation had been put together with a high degree of skill, particularly the editing. Montages de Roivara's home landscape—sun-baked hillsides, dusty village lanes



higher content of music, than others. A video tape of a wine-soaked derelict expiring after being struck by a truck contained no mystery, no subtlety, no significance. It might provide a quick, crude fix, nothing more but the carefully observed death of a great artist, a historical figure, an individual of power and importance—from sharing those experiences, the witness gained not only release, but a portion of wisdom; to use a crude analogy, it was like the difference between spending ten solid minutes with a common streetwalker and a perfect virgin.

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written on the endpapers of a prison Bible

on the morning of his execution:

*How can a voice stop time?
From within the windows of pain
They embroidered my darkness
Until my cries like harshest
Ecstasies, tore apart the
Heart, unpersuaded silence.*

*What is left of my art is this:
To burn up coldly
that it might exist.*

At the final sonorous lines, rolling like thunder on the narrator's Churchillian tones, Francois' hooded artisans—who had prolonged the garroting, on Franco's direct orders, for nearly twenty minutes—gave the screws a final twist. The writer's tongue shot out of his mouth, riding a crest of foam like a foaming surfboard, and as he soundlessly screamed, the Dark Angel intensified her carresses so that Billy Wayne Sedberry's groans seemed to mingle with those of the dying poet and for one transcendent instant he drew power, beauty, and spiritual nourishment from the giving up of that majestic poet's essence.

Two months later, Sturdivant had pushed the frontiers of Sedberry's experience still further; by showing him a graffito-clandestine film of the execution, by gullotine, of an exquisitely beautiful Algerian girl named Djiamila Achkor, convicted of a series of bloody terrorist bombings in 1960. She had been thoroughly and professionally interrogated, of course, but the presentation tastefully avoided dwelling on the sordid business with electrodes and tubs of ice water. Instead, it hinted, by means of quick, almost subliminal frames—grainy, dark, as though the pictures had been taken under sediment-laden water—at the sheer desecration of beauty. In counterpoint, the camera roamed slowly and poetically over the anatomy of a young woman who was either Djiamila herself or a double close enough to be her twin. The narrator, without claiming authenticity for this foot-note, spoke teasingly of the fact that Djiamila had been a prostitute, and a star of pornographic movies, up until she achieved ideological salvation in her seventeenth year; it was possible, just possible, that these films were authentic. The whole montage was as resolute of sweet adolescent sexual-

ity as a David Hamilton photo-spread, and it made Sedberry ache for a kind of ravenging sexual innocence that he had never experienced.

Then, with a blinding, shocking suddenness, the presentation moved on to a surgically dispassionate discussion of the guillotine, accompanied by shots of Djiamila being bound by fierce crewcut paratroopers in mirrored sunglasses. Her innocent face was transfixed by terror, while the narrator moved on to a cold exposition of the unanswerable "Guillotine Question":

"Does the head continue to live, even for a millisecond, after the blade has fallen? Dozens of eyewitnesses from the time of the French Revolution described heads that would not lie still in the basket; eyes that blinked, mouths that formed words or sought to voice a soundless scream. Medically speaking, the continuation of consciousness after the trunk has been severed seems a dubious proposition, but no one can know for certain. In this case, the commandant of the prison had made a bet with his chief torturer—that is why the execution of Djiamila Achkor was filmed in slow motion..."

Never removing her cold, Olympian gaze from his own eyes, gauging her emotions and pressures and frictions entirely through the feedback loop she had created with Sedberry's nervous system, the Dark Angel brought him to an agonizing peak and then contrived to hold him there while the blade fell, held him yet another second while the head came into focus, lying askant on a concrete pedestal. Clearly, whether directed by conscious will or muscular reflex, the girl's full and succulent lips did move, seeming to form a word. As Sturdivant blotted his chil, self-referential smile and struggled, The subject is one of infinite interest. And the services I perform are important to a greater number of all you can perhaps imagine. Naturally, where a demand exists, it is the broker's duty to obtain the product. I have spent years and

several fortunes creating the network that makes it all go." For the first time in their relationship, Sedberry had heard a genuine glow of emotion in Sturdivant's tones—was it pride?—and it occurred to him that Sturdivant might well be a greater pervert than any of his customers.

One evening, in an unusually expansive mood, Sturdivant had let drop a mention of what he called the "Italy Grail" of soft-movie cinema and Sedberry exploded. It seemed, for a hallucinatory moment, as though he poured his seed in that blood-hot and vulnerable mouth upon the screen. This experience had so shaken him, so taken him into an arena of human experience which had no name and no possible

sanc-tion from God or man, that Sedberry had stopped his trips to Washington for two months.

He returned, of course, as Sturdivant had known he would. Yielding fully to his obsession, he gorged himself on Death, and in turn he sought to choke Death with the floods of his own vitality. In the ensuing months he witnessed an astonishing array of expirations: movie stars, authors, statesmen, a couple of rock stars—all their deaths passed before his eyes, all intersected with his flesh, even as they abandoned their own.

Now the screen showed a continual pageant of Hitler's march of conquest. Nation after nation fell before the blade of his panzers, race after race went into the boxcars, into the showers, up the hideous chimneys belching oily clouds of smoke into the Polish sky. Jews, Poles, Slavs, Gypsies. In the counter-point, the narrator outlined the growth of the anti-Hitler conspiracy, building up an impression of collective nobility and dedication. The officers who risked their way into

the showers, up the hideous chimneys belching oily clouds of smoke into the Polish sky, stroked that Sedberry came to know them, and to tremble for their fate.

He had once asked Sturdivant: how did there come to be so many films? Sturdivant had smiled his chil, self-referential smile and shrugged. The subject is one of infinite

private collection, I am sure my agents would have located them by now. There are several connoisseurs who have offered very substantial amounts for the conspirator films. A businessman with my reputation hates to come up empty-handed, but...

Sturdivant struggled. They had enjoyed terrible luck, those conspirators. Explosive devices that failed, sudden changes in the Führer's itinerary which con-

tinuously destroyed the films themselves were destroyed during the final days of the Third Reich. If they ever found their way into a private collection, I am sure my agents would have located them by now. There are several connoisseurs who have offered very substantial amounts for the conspirator films. A businessman with my reputation hates to come up empty-handed, but...

"...Each man was suspended just off the ground, so that his toes might obtain just enough fleeting purchase to alleviate his death-agonyes a few seconds at a time..."

...founded the most elaborate plots, assassins whose nerve failed at the last minute—all of it culminating in the heroic and almost successful attempt by the one-armed hero Count Stauffenberg. On the screen were newsreel shots of the shattered conference room, then pictures of an ash-faced Hitler touring the still-smoking rubble with a baggy and obviously distraught Mussolini tagging behind him like a forlorn but obedient bulldog.

The conspirators' trial, a shameless public spectacle, was now highlighted with a series of shots whose editing gave an effect of momentum, of quickening toward the climax. From the thick shadows at the edge of the theater, the Dark Angel drifted into his peripheral vision. Tall, grave, as though carved from warm marble, she knelt and touched him, so very knowingly, with the razor-edged nail of one long tapering finger. A shudder of excitement coursed through

him. The build-up was already extraordinary strong; the sense of historical tragedy, of overwhelming cultural and metaphysical resonance, that was communicated to him from this tragic story, had shaken open the deepest conduits of his flesh, opened the valves to every reservoir of feeling within being led to a Gestapo basement. Hitler had ordered the method of their deaths, as well as its meticulous and teatenuously thorough documentation: each man was to be suspended just off the ground, so that his toes might obtain just enough fleeting purchase to alleviate his death agonies for a few seconds at a time, by nooses of wire attached to meathooks in the ceiling. The meathooks, the narrator informed Sedberry, had been obtained from a real slaughterhouse. After a long time, of course, exhaustion would take its toll and the dangling men would slowly strangle to death.

Close-ups of the faces. Field Marshal von Wrangel, Generals Haepner, Steiff, von Hase, and the handsome young Count van Wartenburg. Stripped to the waist, hands bound tightly behind them. Once hoisted on their tripes, their belts were unfastened gradually cause their pants to drop—a humiliating touch that also came straight from a Rurher directive.

What was it Sturdivant had told him about the erotic reflex of asphyxiation? Surely it had been true, for each of the hanging men, as their trousers slipped pathetically over their writhing hips and shuddering buttocks, was revealed to be tunicless. The entire spectacle was more baroque, more engorged with nuance and reverberation, more overwhelmingly catastrophic, than anything Sturdivant had ever provided for him before. Moving fluidly from his seat to the floor, the Dark Angel matched his crescendo of excitement with the virtuosic workings of her unsomiling mouth. Sedberry was near to fainting with excitement as the men on the screen—all those field marshals and counts and generals stiff

with Prussian rectitude—danced a wild bucking tarantella, their toe blood from scrabbling against their manhoods flapping and stabbing the air.

Sedberry gatherec wind for a bellow; he was about to come like a prize bull, from every confluence of his system. On the drawn-out cusp that led to the precipice, however, he observed something unusual, disturbing: behind the images on the screen, dimly visible now that his eyes had grown used to the flickering darkness, he could see the outline of two tripods. Just as he realized it was too late to stop his own climax—the event was roaring down the tracks like a four-mile freight crossing Kansas—he also realized that spotlights were coming up on the spot where he sat. Then he saw the video cameras atop the tripods and he knew they were recording every particle of this experience. From inside his chair came the tense click of spring-loaded blades cocking. Steel bands snapped around his wrists and ankles as the Dark Angel countered his convulsion of fear with irresistible powerful lassings of her own. Understanding exploded in his skull just as his body, unable to retreat from the Dark Angel's skills, began its eruption. Before the intensity of mingled sensations forced him to close his eyes, he looked back at her. For the first time, she was smiling.

Not long afterward, an unmarked tow truck removed the nondescript rental car. Mr. Sturdivant carefully placed his new video tape in the vault where he stored his merchandise. Then he poured himself a brandy and looked up a long distance number on his rolorex. There was a television evangelist in Tennessee who had been on a very special waiting list for some months, and Sturdivant, good businessman that he was always tried to deliver the goods.



Festival of Sigma Martyrs

When I was a child
Forced to attend church
I would stare at the adults
Waiting with open mouths
To eat flesh and drink blood
Of a body [I was told] that
Died two thousand years ago
In a far away place.

Now I watch television:

In the Middle East
Mounds of bodies pile up
Around holy warriors.
White hooded Americans
Raise burning crosses high
Laughing at their head-shaven children
Marching in black soldier boots
Saluting long dead German leaders.
And the Pope continues resting
Waiting for another parade and
The crowd that will gather
To receive communion.

—Chad Hensley



contemporary settings. The most effective horror stories are the ones dealing with people and their surroundings as they are now; you have to touch the person reading your yarns, and writing about the world they experience each day makes the dark, horrific portion of the work all the more convincing. It's the truest way I know to evoke a shiver (but not the only way).

As for where I'm going in the field, of course my goal is to do work that is good enough to achieve some sort of critical recognition. The best way to do that is to be innovative, and that's also the most difficult thing in the world to do. Failing that, one has to do work that is unique, if not in content, then in style. The step below that is mere competence, about where I think I am now and a couple of categories beneath where I wish to be. For a long time I moped about, whining that I couldn't write like so-and-so and such-and-such; but I finally fought through that and now I'm just trying to develop my own "voice."

DEATHREALM: My *HELLRAISER* yarns usually take me anywhere from twenty seconds to thirty minutes to hash out. The actual construction of the script is something else. Those are fifteen page affairs [illustrated], and it generally takes me two to three hours to do a good job on one, although I am getting faster at producing them.

DEATHREALM: I expect your writing background is pretty firmly entrenched in literary fiction. How is it different to compose a story for the comics as compared to straightforward prose? Do you have to consciously change your mental gears in order to write for a primarily visual medium?

DEATHREALM: You appear to be quite versatile as a writer. In *DEATHREALM*, you've had a very traditional piece that relies on atmosphere and subtle plotting to engage the reader (Patched) as well as a supernatural tale (*The Call*) that you originally wrote with intent to "out-Lovercraft Lovercraft." On the other hand, you've composed a "Cine Barker" pastiche for the Epic Comics' *HELLRAISER* series, and your story in *TABOO* (well) went so far as to be called "offensively sexist" by Ellen Datlow. What is your favorite type of dark fiction—*as a writer*—and where do you see yourself going in the field?

SMITH: My favorite type of "dark fiction" is the type of stories that are set in the modern world. I think that if the reader is to feel any true emotion during the reading, then the tale must be firmly rooted in real,

600 words) synopses that are heavy on visual imagery while crammed in as much as possible when those words are competing for elbow room with colors and textures and smells; heavy characterization is virtually unheard of in a comic synopsis.

The plot's the thing. So yeah, you do have to change gears a bit when doing that kind of work.

DEATHREALM: How much time do you ordinarily spend on a script, say *HELLRAISER*, from the conception of the idea to its final scripting? How about a prose story of comparable complexity?

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DEATHREALM: How do professional comic markets compare to pro fiction markets, as far as difficulty in placing your work?

SMITH: Since I've only placed a couple of stories what are defined as "pro" markets, and have sold well over a hundred pages of comic script, I'd like to say that the comic market is easier to crack. But it isn't. Unfortunately, the current practice in the comic industry is a form of professional nepotism, in which the editors in charge of buying for their specific titles are passing on the scripting chores to other editors, who are friends. (I know this must sound like sour grapes, but many of the industry professionals will back me up on this.) It's impossible to track it, but it's damned difficult. You have to locate an editor who is willing to look at work not done by the guy who works one office down from him, an author who can't give him a scathing report on another title. I don't feel I run into this

Yes, it's hard, but at least I know I'm facing an impartial reader.

DEATHREALM: What about pay rates—do comics pay more per gallon of brain juice?

SMITH: Comics are far and away superior to the short story market. It's a sad fact that no one can make a living in the post-pulp times writing short stories; the days of Bob Howard are long gone. The most I've been paid for a prose cent is seven cents a word. I have been paid, counting royalties, roughly \$2,000 for a single fifteen page story in the comics industry and I know writers who make more than a hundred grand per year writing for comics.

However, the down side is that when you're not dealing with the big two (Marvel and DC), you are taking risks. Some of the smelliest human beings on this planet are involved in publishing comics in the alternative market (non-Marvel/DC); a lot of these people don't mind telling you I've done work for which I've never been paid, and that is something I won't repeat. I learned my lesson about contracts, and I will never again do work that is not payment-on-acceptance, unless that work is self-published. If you are planning on working with a small publisher, my advice would be to ask as many comics professionals as possible what that publisher's reputation is.

DEATHREALM: I know you've written a novel or two that you're trying to sell—how's it going? Do you have long range plans for a professional novelist?

SMITH: Yes, my goal has always been to be a novelist; which I reckon I am despite no publishing credits there—an unpublished novelist. Although I do comics work, my biggest kick is writing prose, and I most enjoy writing when I'm working on a novel. In addition to that, the only way to realistically make a living as a writer of fiction is to do it selling novels. I'm now at the mercy of my second agent, and it's all a waiting game after you finish the novel.

Pretty frustrating business, this is not something for a nail-biter.

DEATHREALM: What is your aim in your fiction writing—both in your prose and problem when trying to place a short story.

as well as *NEW BLOOD*, *ELDRITCH*, *TALES*, and the anthology *SCARECARE*.

DEATHREALM: You appear to be quite versatile as a writer. In *DEATHREALM*, you've had a very traditional piece that relies on atmosphere and subtle plotting to engage the reader (Patched) as well as a supernatural tale (*The Call*) that you originally wrote with intent to "out-Lovercraft Lovercraft." On the other hand, you've composed a "Cine Barker" pastiche for the Epic Comics' *HELLRAISER* series, and your story in *TABOO* (well) went so far as to be called "offensively sexist" by Ellen Datlow. What is your favorite type of dark fiction—as a writer—and where do you see yourself going in the field?

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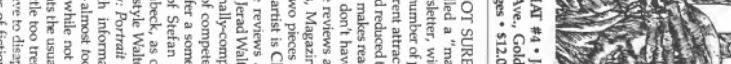
TIAMAT #4 • Jerad Walters, 12051 West 20th Ave., #4, Golden, CO 80401 • 8" x 8" • 18 pages • \$12.00 for 4 issues/1 year.

I'M NOT SURE if **TIAMAT** can properly be called a "magazine"—it's more like a newsletter, with its square page format, short number of pages, and focus on reviews of current attractions. The text is typewritten and reduced to fit two columns per page, which makes reading it something of a chore if you don't have 2020 vision.

The reviews are divided into categories Books, Magazines, Film, Video, and Art, plus two pieces of fiction. The issue's featured artist is Chris Friend.

The reviews are written, I assume, by professionally-composed, while not exactly pro-level of competence that enthralls. I tended to prefer a somewhat cooler tone such as that of Steven Dzieniarowicz or Gary Braumeck, as opposed to the very colloquial style Walters employs. His review of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* gives me enough information to want to see the film—almost too much; his *RoboCop II* review, while not overwhelmingly negative, presents the usual anti-sequel sentiment that is a little too trendy among reviewers.

I have to disagree very strongly with the choices of fiction in this issue. I found much talk, by Bonnes' Gavry-snake (how much you wanna bet that his *Bonnes himself?*) and Roger Anderson, both very amateurish and silly, even though Gravy-snake's *My Unconscious Cat* contained some of the same kind of writing.



of humor that color Writers' reviews. My preference would be to see the entire magazine devoted to reviews and whatever news items Mr. Wallers might have at his disposal.

I'm not impressed by Mr. Friend's article, I'm sorry to say. While he shows a certain fine-essence in the treatment of his evil faces (which is apparently all he draws), the backgrounds are all scribbles completely lacking in style. I'm not the world's best artist, or art critic, but I have a good grasp of what I like, and this isn't it. My apologies to the artist.

THIAMAT as a product, certainly has its place. Innovative? I wouldn't go that far, but if you enjoy conversational reviews with a touch of crudity, you'll probably enjoy it.

Artwork is sparse and the qualities and similarities end.

AMAZING EXPERIENCES #1 (A273).
Homer, 544 Yeracino Valley Road, CA 95656.
PO Box 840, Walnut Creek, CA 94595-0840.
8½" x 11" • \$4 pages • \$1.00 for single issue.



FIGMENT #4•I.C. Hendee, PO Box 3564

present, write not overwelmingly negative reviews; present the usual anti-buchanan sentiment that is a little too trendy among reviewers. I have to disagree very strongly, though, of the choices of fiction in this issue. I found much better tales, by Bonnies Gravy-snake (which I am sure you wanna bet it has is Bathers himself!) and Roger Anderson, both very amateurish and silly, even though Gravy-snake's *An Unusually successful* Cat contained some of the same think-

HAVE THE distinct feeling that the editors of *FIGMENT*, J.C. and Barb Hendee, took a good, long look at *DEATHREALM* when they put their magazine together. The typefaces are different, and *FIGMENT* is done on a laser printer, but the similarity issues/1 year.

a way to go before reaching what I think ultimately deserves to do—showcase a very balanced, polished mixture of fiction that crosses genres, minus **NEW BLOOD**’s grotesques. The editors, who from what I read of them seem a little too modest about their endeavor, do a respectable—comparable—job now. I’d like to see them reach for more original packaging.

By contrast, also included in this issue were many tiny awful stories typical of small press masters. Michael LaRreme's *A Night Alone* should have been left alone, and The Herron by Jon-I. Herron was about as poorly constructed and executed as anything you're likely to read in the small press. These stories are virtual textbook cases (Continued on page 56)

The reviews are written by editor Jerad Walters. While a professionally-composed, level of competence that enables one to prefer a somewhat cool-headedness to that of Stefan Dziedzic or Braunbeck, as opposed to the quial style Walters's employer, Henry: *Portrait of a Serialist*, film — almost too much; his

TIAMAT #4 • Terri Walters, CO 80401 • 817-205-8168
20th Ave. • \$12.00 for 4 issues/1 year.
18 pages • \$12.00 for 4 issues/1 year.

The image shows the front cover of a book titled "FIGMENT TALES FROM THE IMAGINATIONAL". The title is at the top in large, bold, serif capital letters. Below it is a subtitle in smaller, all-caps letters. The background of the cover features a detailed, black-and-white illustration of a fantastical scene. On the left, there's a large, multi-headed dragon-like creature with scales and sharp claws. To its right, several small, winged figures resembling fairies or angels are flying. The background is filled with numerous bright, star-like points of light of varying sizes, some with trails, suggesting a celestial or dreamlike environment. The overall aesthetic is whimsical and imaginative.

Rausch's piece. Cary-Baburuz gets a little too cut from fantasy/satire, also summarizing my interests with a much more satisfying ending than Rausch's piece.

Cary-Baburuz gets a little too cut from my cutes with *Reflections of Misery*, also a product for dry skin that goes overboard. I very much enjoyed the atmosphere of Hornbostel's *Third Dimension Plus*, though I didn't think it as well-written than some of the stories in the issue. In this one, a robbing history professor discovers a beautiful tapestry in Florence, Italy, which supposedly belonged to Leonardo Da Vinci. Above and beyond that, the door that features prominently in the tapestry opens...to the unknown. Beware.

or very deep gaps. There were seven stories in the issue, two by editor-hardsons. I was pleased to see Kevin Anderson's "The Old Man and the Cherry Tree," which originally came out in **GREEN #3**, a bit before my time in the small press. What we have here is a fable told in almost archaic prose, and set in feudal Japan—the type of story Darrel Schweitzer does well, as did Ray Bradbury once wrote. It's a nice piece of work. Also reprinted here was "Watchdog" by Robert Silverberg, a bland, uninspired tale that had to have passed muster through author name recognition—very disappointing.

or layout and design is a little too strict or artwork is sparse, mostly line drawing and the quality is a bit inconsistent. But appearances are pretty much where it similarities end.

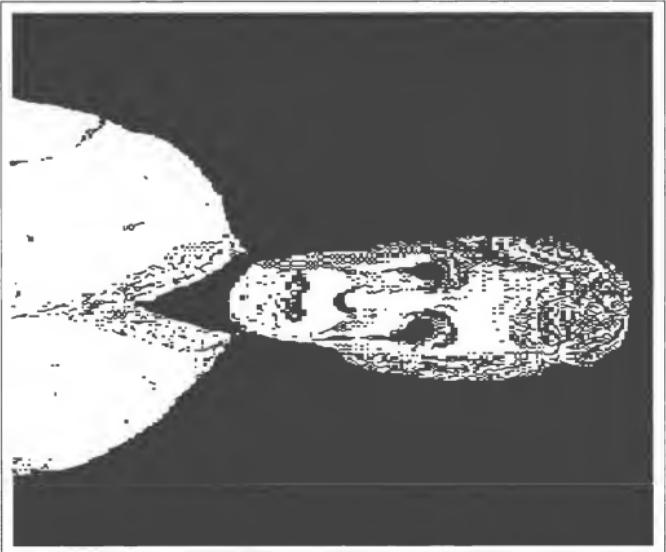
The fiction in **FIGMENT** – consisting of six stories – is mostly fantasy and science fiction oriented, with only a sprinkling of horror here and there. I thoroughly enjoyed Kristine Kathryn Rusch's *Light Thruways*, Mist, a quaint little fantasy until the very end, where the good old circular phone亭 contrivance rears its ugly head. The strengths of Rusch's writing, at least, make the piece as a whole more than palatable.

Michael J. O'Connell's *Ah, Ditty*, a sci-

AMAZING EXPERIENCES #1 Jon Heron, 544 Yerocino Valley Road, #1, Jon PO Box 840, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. \$8.95 x 11" x 44 pages, \$14.00 for single issue.

FROM MY REFLECTION, DARKLY

DAVID NIALL



IT HAS BEEN hours since I last saw Eric, a lifetime of shattered reality, an age of dissolving foundations — eternity. I know I should go to him, should try to help, but I know also that he would not answer if I called, would not come to the door, were I to knock. I must look horrible, hair unkempt, face scratched from my attempt this morning to shave. I could not use the mirror.

Eric Blount, student of the arcane philosopher of dreams, academic genius, was my best friend. I had grown up a quiet, shy boy, uncertain of what I would do with the great

gift of life ahead of me. Eric knew what he wanted. He wanted to go beyond the gift, to see whence it came and to follow it to its source. Life held no contentment for such a man. He inspired me in both awe and an incredulous, half-hero worship that even the ridiculousness of the bulk of his conjectures failed to stifle. He was incorrigible.

It started harmlessly enough, or so it would have seemed. He spent hours alone, pouring over volumes of arcane "wisdom," searching the pages upon pages of words left behind by such luminaries as Eliphas Levi, Alastair Crowley, and Madame Blavatsky. He spent a good three years among the adepts of the modern Rosicrucian Order. That was an amusing period, what with the candles and altars and assorted implements of their rituals, and associated with these uncesses with these unlikely arts, he was not happy with his progress.

"I would be dead twice over before I could discover anything truly valuable at this rate," he complained one day. He had shown up at my apartment with two aged bottles of Spanish wine, which he knew for my weaknesses, and launched immediately into a discourse on the futility of his past years' research.

"Why try, then?" I inquired. "I would seem you are left with the choices of enjoying your life in some normal pursuit, or wasting it in search of secrets admittedly beyond your grasp."

To my surprise, he did not take offense at this, only fell into a meditative quiet that made me nervous. When he truly began to think, that was the time he was most to be avoided. His thoughts too often took Frost's path less traveled.

"Consider this," he said at last, pausing

to refill our glasses and to order his thoughts. "Suppose that research is not the answer. For argument's sake, what if there are times, places, even activities that bring us

to a nearer point of truth? Rationality aside, is it not the greatest of hindrances in this type of affair, suppose, a poet, a while-writer, is in some sort of rapport with some higher state of existence? Or an artist, certainly a writer can mold from mere words on paper images that warp reality as we know it; yet make it real for us at the same time."

"Are you saying, then," I asked with a grin, that our reality can be made less real by these artists?"

"Not exactly," he answered. "I am trying to suggest, and I know that this will amuse you, but bear with me, that such creative acts have had a great part in the creation of our reality. I believe that man, given a choice, sees, touches, and believes in what

would be most convenient or beneficial to man. Were enough people to decide to perceive red as 'yellow,' it would be yellow, and all those who still saw red would be issued corrective lenses and labeled as abnormal."

Surely, you can't believe this is true of everything?" I exclaimed, certain that I would get the better of this argument. "If that were the case, could we not disbelieve the chairs from beneath us and send ourselves crashing to the floor?"

Eric eyes momentarily shamed my amusement, but only momentarily. The light of the hunter on a trail was in them, and I released myself to another period of his eccentricity.

"We spoke then of other things until the bottles were both dry. Eric then rose, bidding me a good night, sleep, and departed to the shadows of the streets. As he left, he stopped by the large, full-length mirror I kept beside my door. Being particular of my appearance, I had purchased it some years earlier on an auction. He spoke no word as he gazed at his reflection, but his expression was odd, as though struck to the first time by some peculiarity of his appearance. At the time, I paid this no mind. Since then I have had occasion to dwell upon it in

sharp detail. I wish to God I'd reached out and put my fist through that glittering surface and shattered it then and there, damning the risk to bone and skin.

It was several weeks later that I decided to return Eric's visit. After procuring two bottles of Campo Viejo, I began the mile or so trek to his flat. I seldom made use, in those days, of public transportation, and the risks of operating a private vehicle on the roadways grew less enticing with each passing headline. Eric felt the same. Our visits invariably began with one of us making the journey across several residential blocks and through the paths of the Municipal Park. The trip was somewhat more uncomfortable on my part, with Eric living as he did among the more run-down tenements, and I hurried my steps upon reaching his side of the park.

The front door to his building hung open, dangling loosely from one hinge. I made my usual mental note to prevail upon him to move out. His reasons for remaining in such seedy surroundings had always remained obscure to me. His inheritance as last survivor of a well-do-do family left him amply provided for.

"It's the freedom," Percy, he'd once told me. "No women peering at their window to yours, discussing things that are no business of theirs and drawing attention to where it is not desired. People here respect your privacy, as long as you lock it away tightly enough."

He had indeed succeeded in this. I knocked on the metal reinforced door loudly, nervously glancing every few seconds over my shoulder to the shadows that seemed to shift behind my back whenever I denied them my attention. After a few moments, I heard hurried footsteps within. "What is it?" Eric called, not opening at once.

"Percy," I answered, "only Percy, Eric, come to return your visit, and your wine. Open this door, you know how this place makes me nervous."

There was a clatter of chains, a rattling wide of bolts and locks, and the door swung open. I did not enter immediately—my shock would not allow it.

The apparition before me hardly reminded me of my friend at all. He was gaunt, not in the manner of one who is starved, but as though he'd not slept for days—perhaps weeks. His eyes, bloodshot and dark with fatigue, darted about wildly, searching the shadows that had plagued me only moments before. I found my own fears magnified intensely. Pushing Eric aside, I darted into the room, slamming the door behind me.

"My God, man!" I cried. "What is happening here? You look half-dead, not to mention delirious. You've even gotten me nervous."

"Come," he replied, "to the den."

I followed, depositing the wine bottles on a table in passing and making a vain attempt to straighten my now disheveled appearance. I made to glance into the mirror in the hall, but to my consternation, it was curtained with a cloth of deepest jet. I moved to pull it aside, and Eric leapt, his shaking hands clutching like takers, and grasped my arm with surprising strength. My hand stopped inches from the dark cloth covering the mirror.

"What?" I stuttered, backing away and pulling my arm free. "What in hell are you doing? I only wanted to comb my hair! Why in blazes is the damnable thing covered, anyway?"

"Not yet," he hissed, tugging on my arm. "First come to me, it is safe there." By this time I was beginning to seriously fear for my friend's mental state. I had seen him act in a frenzied fashion on many occasions, but never to the point of inducing discomfort upon himself. It was unnatural, and it made me not a little nervous to be alone with him in such condition. With a longing glance at the mirror, I allowed him to lead me through the bedchamber that closed off his "sanctum sanctorum" from the more mundane parts of his home.

This room had never failed to invite my curiosity, even my awe, I suppose, in the intricately piled and jumbled displays of occult bric-a-brac it offered, the shelves piled with dusty, ancient volumes, and walls hidden behind brightly colored tapestries. It was truly impressive, or had been so on

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my last visit.

Now it was filled with clutter along the walls. The furniture lay piled in corners, dragged as far as possible from the room's center. A brazen stool, small wisps of incense smoke wafting from its coals, marking the very center of the floor. Around it was drawn a circle in white, perhaps six feet in circumference. Concentrically, a larger circle, seemingly burnt into the wooden floor surrounded this. From the outer edge of the larger circle, the points of a pentagram shot outward toward the walls of the room.

Strange symbols lined the space between the circles. With a final exulting glance to see certain I'd followed, Eric leapt over the symbols I'd laid, breathing in ragged gulps within the center ring.

"Come on, man, for God's sake!" he cried. "I promise I'll tell you everything, but you've got to get within the circle!" Seeing no alternative but blind flight, I succumbed to his wishes, walking slowly into the circle.

"No!" he cried, as my foot scraped accidentally across one of the symbols. Scrambling about on his hands and knees, he feverishly repaired the damage with a piece of charcoal from beneath the brazier. Sweating profusely, he turned to face me, sinking to the floor.

"I know how this must look," he finally gasped. Silently, I believed he did not, but I listened as he went on. "Believe me, if I could find a way to stop it, I would. There is no way out now, I have seen too much!"

"What have you seen?" I asked, seated myself opposite him on the floor. "You look to be half-dead, man. When was the last time you slept?"

"Slept?" His eyes



"Surely you don't wish me to believe mirrors are conspiring to subjugate humanity...I am an imaginative man, but not

that imaginative...."

We spoke of reality. "I remember a silly notion you brought forth about reality being only a product of our own desires, surely you aren't referring to that nonsense?"

"I am," he stated flatly. "I have come upon knowledge, forbidden knowledge, and now there is no way to turn back."

"Nonsense," I asserted, rising to my feet. "You are coming out of here with

"Do you remember our last conversation? We spoke of reality."

"I remember a silly notion you brought forth about reality being only a product of our own desires, surely you aren't referring to that nonsense?"

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"Nonsense," I asserted, rising to my feet. "You are coming out of here with

me now before this gets completely out of hand, and we're going to see a doctor."

Eric made no move to follow, only dropping his head pathetically onto his hands. "You don't believe me," he choked out. "Percy, for God's sake, I am not neurotic. I fear for my soul! They are in the mirror, waiting, waiting for me!"

It was worse than I'd thought. He was shaking uncontrollably, quivering in fear. Reluctantly, resigned myself to humoring him for the moment. Returning to my seat on the floor, I said, "Eric, tell me, then. Convince me of what you fear, and if you do not, then I will bear you out of here by the strength of my own two arms, and no nonsense!"

Shrugging briefly into a shadow off beyond my shoulder, he began once more to speak. His voice had a distant, echoing quality, perhaps an illusion of the great empty chamber in which we sat, and the growing shadows that surrounded us.

"I sat under the sky," he began. "I had determined that, if my theory were correct, there would be something else behind every sight that met my eyes, a deeper level of reality. The question, of course, was how to see it. The knowledge, or theory, that something lies hidden in an illusion, is not enough to dissolve the mental conditioning of a lifetime. I searched for hours, even trying hallucinogenic drugs, in an attempt to find a deeper truth in the sky. I found nothing.

"Then I had an idea. There are several occult practices in the realm of what is known as visualization. One is the manufacturing in your own mind an image of such clarity that you can smell, even taste it. I studied this at great length during my time among the Rosicrucian Order."

I stopped the smile from flooding my features, but only just. My memories of Eric during his period he'd just mentioned were both amusing and vivid. Had thought him quite the sorcerer, for a while.

"I decided," he continued, "to take this concept one step further. Choosing the image of a great, curtained window, I put myself into deep trance and began to visualize in the manner of my training. I have quite a talent for this particular discipline,

it took very little time to create my window. Previously, this image, as well as links to certain realizations of self doors to my subconscious, you might say. This time I determined to go yet another step. I opened my eyes slowly, forcing the image to remain clear by deepest concentration. What I now sought to achieve was the superimposing of my image onto the screen of the sky.

"At first, it wavered, all I could see was blue. Then this began to blur; my eyes crossing somewhat, as if looking not directly at the sky, but out of the corners of my sight. This began to create a void, one was able to weave my own images upon."

"The window?"

"Yes," he sighed. "but that was just the beginning. After a few moments of the euphoria of success, I began to follow the visualization ritual to its conclusion. I began to open the curtains I had implanted on the sky, to seek what lay beyond the cool, pleasant blue we had agreed upon."

"And you saw something? A hallucination, perhaps?"

"No hallucination, Percy." His eyes snapping back from the shadows to claim mine with an almost audible snap of energy. I nearly jumped. "I saw a leaping, swirling void. Percy, there were no clouds, no dust, nothing but endless spirals. I felt drawn to their center—pulled, and I fancied that my back lifted from the solid surface beneath me, beginning to spin, turning with the vortex that spun faster, darker, and deeper every second within the squared expanse of the window I'd created.

"I ripped my eyes free with only the greatest of efforts, closing them and struggling frantically to erase from them the accursed image of that window. My arms and legs were numb, disconnected from my control, and the spinning sensation continued for what seemed an eternity. I was awash with nausea, unable to stabilize my churning stomach, or my chaotic thoughts.

"Eventually, I awakened, as if from a dream. My head ached as if I'd single-handedly employed a fifth of cheap Scotch. I rose and looked about myself. It had grown dark. I glanced upward at the starry blackness, or where it should have been, and was

struck immediately by a wave of vertigo, dropping me back to my knees. The world seemed to shift beneath me, the air to whirl. I clamped my eyes closed again and staggered to my feet. I have never experienced such a terror. Percy, I feared to look upward, feared I would be sucked into the void and lost for eternities....

When my own mind had resumed control, I ran, my eyes rooked to the ground beneath my feet."

"Eric," I cut him, alarmed. "You mentioned an hallucinogenic drug. Were you..."

"No, Percy," he stated earnestly. "I swear to you that I was on nothing stronger than a single shot of Scotch, and that several hours before, I saw what I saw, and it still there. Percy, the sky is an illusion!"

Now certain that he was in dire need of help, I determined to get him out of the house. I placed my hand firmly upon his arm. "Eric, you have to come with me, man. Look at yourself. This is insanity!"

"But there is more," he cried, shaking free and backing away slightly. "Mirrors, Percy, they are not what they seem. I have seen, and have been seen, and we are not alone."

"Surely you don't wish me to believe mirrors can control our minds?"

I tried to answer lightly. "I am an imaginative man, but not that imaginative." "Do not jest, Percy," he cried, eyes flaring in anger. "I will show you, damn it! You may laugh then, but you will see! You will see more than you wish."

He leapt to his feet, then, running to the hallway, almost scurrying. I followed as quickly as I could, intending to make certain he did not escape me, to return to that shadowed pit of a room.

He stood, when I found him, directly in front of the covered mirror. His countenance in the deepening shadow was specious, like the emanance of an entity. I was awash quickly, as if I could, intending to make to abduct you—and that for your own good. Pry yourself from that wall and look, then we are leaving."

Very slowly, his movements stiff and disjoined, Eric pushed himself from the wall. His head was lowered to the floor, and his voice rose faintly from beneath, low and subdued.

"You see what your mind projects," he said. "I know they are there, waiting. My mind has lost its ability to protect me, I pushed aside the veil."

"For God's sake," I cried, grabbing him roughly by the hair in my exasperation.

pulsing of blood through my veins, could hear the innermost workings of my body's organs. I could not, at first, do as he bid. Finally, I calmed somewhat, chiding myself for a fool.

"Alright, Eric," I answered, moving and speaking slowly. I made every effort not to sound patronizing, not telling what his reactions might be. "I will look into your mirror, straighten my hair, which I am certain must be a sight, and then we will march out together. You and I, and gaze at the stars. When this is done, we will take the wine I have brought, retire to my own apartment, and shall call you a doctor. Agreed?" He merely nodded, a pleading in the depths of his eyes reaching out to me to pull him free to prove he was wrong. My throat was strangely dry as I stepped forward, reaching up to grab the black covering and push it aside. Eric turned his head violently to the side as I did this, pressing his face into the wall. I paused for a moment, placing my hand reassuringly on his shoulder. He was shuddering with his weakened frame racked with convulsive sobs. My will hardened by the urgency of his need for help, I yanked aside the curtain and gazed, admittedly with great trepidation, into the glassy surface of the old mirror. Almost immediately I breathed a sigh of relief.

There, returning my stare, was my own face, lines of such serousness creating it to abduct you—and that for your own good. Pry yourself from that wall and look, then we are leaving."

"Now, Eric," I began, "stare at me staring back from your mirror, the only thing likely to abduct you—and that for your own good. Pry yourself from that wall and look, then we are leaving."

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F R O M M Y R E F L E C T I O N , D A R K L Y

"Look at it, Eric, look! It's only you..."

I reeled backward, crashing painfully into the opposite wall and falling to the floor. Eric screamed, screamed in terror beyond my comprehension, screamed until the very pressure of the sound blocked thought from my brain. I could see him standing, eyes glued to the mirror, waving back and forth—entranced.

I could not rise to help. My mind would not ever consider it. His reflection, when I had raised him to the mirror, had not been there. Instead, a swirling blackness had appeared, a hole in the reflective surface, a nothingness. As I'd fallen back, reaching to cover my eyes, a movement had grasped at my mind. Eyes—I think they were eyes—coalesced in the maelstrom of nothingness, staring. They had seen me, just before I fell away, and now they had Eric!

I heard a scrabbling sound. Was something clawing free of that damnable hole? I looked up, fearing to the depths of my soul what I would see. I followed the scratching sounds to their source. Then I screamed. My mind blanked, bending with the sound, emptying of sanity. The scrabbling sound was Eric, his fingernails. They were clutching vainly at the sides of a black void that had replaced the mirror in its frame. His head was gone, up to the shoulders, sucked into the whirling maw of darkness.

Scrambling to my hands and knees, I began to crawl my way down the hallway, careening off walls, caroming from furniture. I broke a large vase and crawled through its shattered pieces, embedding them painfully in the flesh of my hands. The door loomed before me like the im-

penetrable wall of some vast fortress, every shadow, every object seemed to take on an ominous, other-worldly importance. Threats beckoned, thinly veiled, from pulsing shadows. My mind could not sort it out.

I fumbled open the door, rushed outside, and ran, never stopping, never looking up, through the park, across darkened streets, and finally into my home.

I have covered the mirrors, and the windows. I have spoken to no one. Who could I tell? What if, in their ignorance, they tried to cure me as I did Eric? What if they put me before a mirror? Did I see what I believed I'd seen, or was it some strange, psychic projection from Eric's own madness? If he was right, were the walls around me solid, or illusion? The floor? Could I tumble to hell by looking deeper into the wooden slats beneath me?

There is no answer. Two choices have presented themselves to me. The first is this: I should go to the door, cast it open, and gaze into the cool, calming depths of the night-darkened sky. Then I should go to Eric and drag him from the insanity he'd ensnared himself so deeply in that I'd been dragged behind, beyond the strength of reason and rational thought.

I have chosen the second. I have called the emergency room at the hospital, they are on their way now. If my theory is correct, my memories should hold the world together as long as no further disruptive data reaches them. The two pencils are sharp. I only pray that my eyes are the key. At least I shall never again look into a mirror. I will be safe.

The Use Of Mountains

The mountains are available for ceremony.

Their shadowy right shapes could be as old as the tombs of dinosaurs or new as that last dark breath. They can even move about if you wish, though slowly, tied to the music of the moon, the kiss of the wind.

They can follow like strangers or change in a moment like the friend you thought you knew. I use them all the time as the brooding geography of my fear, the uneasy source of dreams. As I lie in bed, eyes haunted by that mass of mystery, drawing them in through the window.

—John Gray

The Uriging

"Last one out's something rotten."
So we used to say, scrabbling

for the pool's slippery edge.

"Last one over's a goner."

So we used to say, jumping

a mean neighbor's hedge.

"Last one left is a loser."

So I said, on a building.
You leaped off the ledge.

"Last one out's something rotten,"
says your heartstone's engraving.
I stand at the grave's open edge.

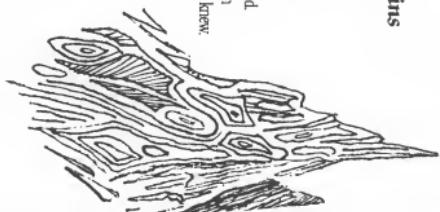
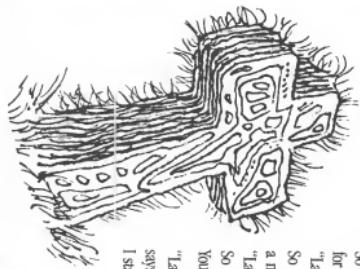
—Carl Buchanan

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WE ARE SEVEN

BY JIM SHELLY



In an all too conspicuous silence, Diana and Officer Royce walked down the stark white halls of the Tampa Bay Detention Center. As she passed by the holding cells plexiglass windows, she caught quick glimpses of men reading, watching TV, and sleeping. Out of nervous agitation, she finally asked, "Does he have a name?"

"He calls himself Angstrom," Royce said. The officer's voice was deep and gruff from years of off duty drinking. Normally it radiated a warm feeling of confidence. Today it was tinged with an uneasy infection.

Diana wrote the name on her legal pad. Her hand left a wet spot on the paper. "Will you be with us during the interview?" "Yes and no. There's a two way mirror in the door, so we can see each other. They're officers. If you need any help, we'll be there before you can blink."

"Why can't you stay in the room?" "He said he wouldn't talk to anyone but you. Don't worry. He's been handcuffed and shackled to one of the chairs and everything in the room is bolted to the floor. You'll be perfectly..."

"Safe," I know, any editor told me all that. I'm still scared."

"That's understandable. To be truthful, he scares me too. Not because of what he's done or how he looks, but because he's utterly insane and you can feel it!"

An awkward moment of silence followed. One of the veteran reporters should be doing this interview. Diana thought, I'll screw this up. Maybe that's what he wants. Then he can have his lawyers throw the case out of court or something.

"I really think this interview is a waste of time," she said.

"You may be right," Royce nodded. "We haven't been able to get him to say more than a few words at a time. He seems to have trouble talking. We're hoping he'll tell you more than he told us. Remember, he may be responsible for more deaths than we know about!"

"But that doesn't seem likely, does it? I mean, he didn't seem to try and hide his tracks very hard. From what I've heard, he never gets to see the tape, but I hear it's pretty gruesome."

"It is," Royce said. "The FBI sent us a copy so we could confirm his identity. Gruesome doesn't really describe it, though. The savage violence that comes across when you watch it is..."

"Uh, so you're certain it's him?" Diana said, trying to change the subject.

"Good luck."

Diana didn't reply. She walked into the room very slowly, as if approaching a vicious dog, just as Royce had said. Angstrom was confined to a very sturdy looking wooden and metal chair in front of a long white table. His back was to her. Long, black hair hung from the right side of his head and ran down past his shoulders. The left side was scarred dark brown and completely hairless.

She walked to the table and sat down across from him. Without ever looking directly at him, she spread several articles from *Time*, *The New York Post*, *USA Today* and her paper *The Tampa Chronicle* on the table to her left. They were just a handful of the articles that had been written about Angstrom. In some he was "Unidentified Killer". In others, he was referred to as "The Burnt Man." A few were accompanied by composite sketches and FBI photos.

Because Diana was unfamiliar with the history of the "Burnt Man Murders", her editor had given her clips to study. He had also given her a yellow legal pad covered with questions. She put the pad on the table to her left and quickly reviewed the ques-

tions. There were three pages of them.

Directly in front of her, in the middle of the table, she placed her tape recorder. As she turned it on, she took a quick glimpse at Angstrom's face.

Almost thirty seconds passed before she realized she was staring.

His nose, mouth and right eye were normal. With his long black hair and piercing blue eyes, he might have passed for a rock star...were it not for the rest of his face.

The scarred portion of his head extended across the front of his face, stopping right between his eyes and running diagonally down his left cheek. The edges of the scar were thick black lines which emphasized the contrast between the burnt flesh and the rest of his skin. It was as if the hands of a clock had been implanted on his face, and as they ticked off the hours, they were slowly revealing a monster. According to the clock, it was 4:00.

When Diana realized she was staring, she flushed, and abashedly slammed out the first question: "Why did you turn yourself in?"

In a cold, cruel voice thick with rage and disgust, Angstrom said, "I saw. I see. I am Angstrom." Diana was about to ask him her next question when she realized he was about to say something else. His eyes were closed and his brow wrinkled in concentration. The muscles in his neck strained and his face was flushed with blood. Finally his lips curled back and he spat out single word. "Persuasion."

His breathing was hard and heavy as if he'd been jogging, and his face was now covered with perspiration.

Diana simply stared at him. She didn't know what to make out of what she'd seen. She waited until he was breathing normally and then asked her next question.

"In Dallas, Texas, you decapitated five Reverend Charles Boswell in front of five thousand witnesses. In Hollywood, you slashed open Terry DeGarmo's throat. Did you kill them because you were envious of



their fame?"

"Again, the seething monotone:
"I saw, I see. I am Angstrom."

And again, the silent struggle as Angstrom forced himself to say, "Persuasion." He stared at Diana as if asking for help.

She grabbed the arms of her chair and looked at another question.

"Anthony Tate, Bruce Wilkerson and Joseph Lombardo. Do these names mean anything to you?"

Angstrom tilted his head to the right and rolled his eyes in restrained annoyance.

"They were police detectives in Chicago. A year and a half ago they were found burned to death at the bottom of a hill where Tate's car had gone off the road.

Witnesses say you were seen drinking with them on the night they died. The Chicago police don't think that your presence was accidental or coincidental.

"Did you kill them?"

Angstrom stared mutely at the tape recorder.

"Two months ago you apparently went on a one-night killing spree in the city of Greenville, Ohio. Among the 43 people murdered were four police officers and the town's city manager. Do you have some sort of vendetta against public officials?"

This time the eyes rolled in disbelief. By the look on his face, Diana could tell that as he struggled to say, "persuasion," he was experiencing pain. When he finally managed to say it, it came out as a pleading whisper:

"What do you mean by 'persuasion'?" Angstrom gazed at her as if in anticipation.

Diana looked to her left and saw the Time article she'd brought.

"Police also think you're responsible for an explosion which took place 14 months ago at the Hillsquare Country Club in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. A debonair ball was being held in the club and a total of 135 people were attending. No one survived. Some people are calling it one of the most brutal acts of mass murder ever committed in America. Why did you do it?"

"The first was Anthony Tate, the police detective in Chicago. He was the youngest in a mix of disappointment and despair. Angstrom tilted his head down. "I saw. I see..."

"Dammit, Angstrom, I'm tired of that. Tell me something or I'm leaving."

"With a sudden surge, Angstrom jerked upright in his seat and his eyes beamed with a sense of relief. A long, deep shiver spread across his face. It made Diana shiver.

"Diana," he said in a controlled voice. "If you could have killed Adolf Hitler while he was still a housepainter, would you have done so?"

Shaken by the use of her name, she answered without thinking. "Yes."

"What if he was attending a house-painter's convention and you didn't know which one he was? Would you kill every painter that attended?"

"That's different. I'm not sure. I don't think so. Tell me what this has to do with you!"

"Suppose I told you that one of the fathers attending that ball was destined to be another Hitler?"

"Wait! I'm totally lost. Could you start from the beginning?"

Angstrom gave the room's two way mirror a quick glance. Slowly, he leaned forward in his chair as close to Diana as his handcuffs would permit.

"We are seven," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. Diana moved her tape recorder closer to him.

"Go on."

"Devastation. Deception. Rejuvenation. Manipulation. Possession. Recognition. And Persuasion. Seven sons of flesh and force. This world's destiny and its damnation."

"Can you be a little more specific?"

"Recognition. That's my power. It means I can read people, tell what they're thinking and feeling. Strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears. I can see them all. However, despite all its possible applications, it was considered to be the weakest of the seven powers. That underestimation cost five of my brothers their lives."

"I still don't understand."

"The first was Anthony Tate, the police detective in Chicago. He was the youngest of the seven. You would have called his power pyrokinesis. With a glance he could burn a person in a fireflash. His power had

years before it reached its full potency. Still, in his prime, he would have been able to incinerate entire cities.

"Because he was my first target and had no reason to fear me, his murder was the easiest to plan. It involved all of getting him too drunk to use his power, and rolling his car off a hill. It would look just like an unfortunate accident. This was important because I didn't want to put the rest of my brothers on their guard any sooner than necessary.

"Called him from a Holiday Inn Lounge on the outskirts of Chicago, told him I was passing by and wanted to know if he'd like to get together. He was delightedly surprised to hear from me and said he'd meet me when he got off his shift."

Angstrom's left hand rose and touched the scarred portion of his face.

"Unfortunately, nothing ever goes as planned."

"True to his word, he arrived at the lounge after his shift, but he also brought two of his buddies from work with him."

Angstrom looked at his hands and a mocking baritone said, "From the very first they?"

"Go back to Tate and Chicago."

"So sat down at a booth I had picked out near a big window and ordered drinks.

When they were about halfway through with theirs, I said I had to go make a business call and excused myself. I then went outside where I could see them through the table's window. I waited until they finished their drinks and were halfway through their refill before coming back in. On my way back in I gave a waitress a hundred dollar bill and told her to have me paged about every fifteen minutes.

"Every time I was paged, I would wait for them to reorder drinks before coming back to the table. This way they were drinking two drinks to my every one."

"As planned. I volunteered to drive them home in return for a cheaper than the Holiday Inn place to stay and Tony agreed.

"About two miles down the highway we just missed a raccoon or something, and found the car on the edge of the road overlooking a very nasty ravine. I got out to see what type of shape the car was in. I left it in neutral.

"Now it should have been easy from there. Cars roll down hill. Explosions. Every body dies. Happy ending.

"And for a second or two, it actually looked like that might happen. The car rolled down the hill, did two somersaults and burst into flame.

"From the top of the hill I watched it burn, overcome with relief, satisfaction and pride. I felt invincible. I was thinking how easy things were going to be...

"When one of the car doors swung open. It was Tony.

"Completely engulfed in fire... and laughing.

"His stance was shaky and his eyes were still standing near it. A piece of the hood took off his head. Without Tony's control over the fire, was able to extinguish my burning body... though with massive third degree burns.

"I was lucky."

Diana stared at him in disgusted disbelief.

"So tell me why only a small part of your head looks burnt. What about the rest of you?"

"Rejuvenation. It's Boswell's power. Of all the seven he was the least threat. He had the power to heal—himself, as well as others."

"Which was why he became a televangelist, I take it?"

Angstrom nodded. "After the fire, I had gone to a hospital where they treated my burns and wrapped me up. The doctors wanted me to stay for a while, but I knew as soon as the news of the Tate fire broke,

I'd be taken in for questioning, so as weak

as I was, I headed for Dallas and Boswell. "Boswell's power works like a battery. He can only heal a select number of people at a time, then he has to stop and 'recharge.' During that period, was his only time he was vulnerable. On the day I arrived in Dallas, I went to the studio where they tape his show. There was a secretary in charge of making out the list of people to be healed that day. She said the list was filled for a month and that I would have to wait. I showed her \$500, and she took a blind woman from Alabama off the list and put me on it. Said there'd been a cancellation." Angstrom chuckled softly.

"When the show started, the 'sickos of the day,' as I heard a stagehand refer to us, were put in a long line that led to the center stage podium where Boswell was laying on hands. There were only 50 people in front of me, so as Boswell began his healings, I let people behind me cut in front. I had to time it so that I would be the last person he could use his power on.

"When he announced that only one more person could feel the Lord's touch that day, I was the one standing before him.

"Because of the damage I incurred in the fire, he didn't recognize me until he started using his power on me. After a few minutes my burn flesh began to resume its natural tone and texture, and he realized who I was. His face....

"Knowing I was one of the seven, he wanted to heal me all the more. As you can see, he was just about finished restoring my body when he ran out of energy. He whispered to me to wait backstage and he would finish treating my burns at the end of the show. I graciously accepted his offer. He told the audience that the work of the Lord is not always easy and asked a blank eyed blonde to escort me to the Divine Guest Room.

"I thanked her all the same, turned to Boswell, who was starting his sermon, and reached into my pocket for..."

"A machine? Tell me why you decided not to use a gun. Wouldn't it have been..." Diana groped for words. "Clever?"

"The problem with a gun is simple. Metal detectors. Every door to the auditorium was equipped with first rate screening devices

as well. I was then forced to leave the studio. I went to the parking lot of a high grade steel and the weight of baseball bat. Properly wielded, it is extremely lethal. One quick stroke with a full follow through, and..."

"And you just walked out of the studio? No one tried to stop you?"

"I see, I saw..."

"Tell me how you got out!"

"In the chaos and confusion that followed Boswell's diagnosis, no one had enough sense or courage to try and stop me. People go into a sort of daze when they witness a truly violent event. They're very open to suggestion. In short, we're bloody mache in peoples' faces, and they get the hell out of your way!"

Angstrom's eyes glazed over and he broke into a deep, slow chuckle. Diana started to smile, then stopped. NO! she thought. He's not funny, not likable, not even believable. He's sick and insane. Don't forget it. She looked down at her notes and without looking back up said, "After Dallas was the Debutante Ball in Chapel Hill. Tell me about that."

"Henry Roarke, a Political Science professor at the University of North Carolina. He had the power of Deception, Illusion. The ability to make you see what he wanted you to see. I couldn't take the chance of coming into direct confrontation with him, because I would always question the reality of the outcome."

"With Boswell, I used a machete, plain and simple. With Roarke, I would never have been able to do that, because I would never be sure if he were standing where I thought he was, if I actually cut or missed him, or if he was mortally wounded or just scratched. With Koarke, what you see is not always what you get!"

"Okay, go on."

"The problem was Tates and Boswell's deaths put him on guard. By the time I had spent thousands of dollars on security

Remember, this is Dallas. They're slightly paranoid about people with guns. The machete I used was made in a city in Africa called Simiola during the 19th century when British trade embargoes made metal hard to come by. It has a tensile strength

to bend it. On the day I arrived in Dallas, I went to the studio where they tape his show. There was a secretary in charge

of making out the list of people to be healed that day. She said the list was filled for a month and that I would have to wait. I

showed her \$500, and she took a blind woman from Alabama off the list and put me on it. Said there'd been a cancellation."

"And you just walked out of the studio? No one tried to stop you?"

"I see, I saw..."

"Tell me how you got out!"

"In the chaos and confusion that fol-

for his home and cars. I tried following his daily routine so I could get an idea of where

would be the best place to try something. That didn't work either, because he started changing the ways he went to the Uni-

versity and his classes, always alternating routes. He also became more reclusive, going to less and less social functions. It took six months of investigation and obser-

ation before I came up with a plan."

"The DeB Ball!"

"It was the one event I knew he couldn't miss. Partly because I think he felt it would be safe, and also because of his blind devotion to his daughter. I always got the impression that he'd sleep down, he had a thing for her. Talking to him sometimes he would say things like..."

"Shut that, and go on to the Ball!"

"Using some connections I had in Char-

lotte, I was able to get explosive plasti-

cine from the North Carolina chapter of the Outlaws, a second rate Hell's Angels type

of bike gang. They have all the vices of

the Angels, without any of the political or

legal savvy. They're a bit more expensive,

but if I had gone to the Angels I would've probably gotten turned in to the FBI in exchange for an early parole for one of their brothers. By now I was pretty sure

my fact was marking the rounds in most

cop shops.

"The detonator was a nine volt battery and a pocket alarm clock. I got with a

subscription to Sports Illustrated. Posing as

an exterminator checking for termites, I was

able to implant the explosives two days

ahead of the ball. It was the easiest and

quickest way I could think to get both

Roarke and his daughter."

"I saw. I see. I am Angstrom."

Diana bit her lip in frustration.

"Okay, tell me about Hollywood."

"Terry DeGarmo. Manipulation. He

could control your emotions. From the most

intense fear to the deepest love. He wielded

the entire emotional spectrum. It's what

made him such a good actor. You always

felt what he wanted you to feel.

"I wanted to use explosives on him too,

but by this time, the police and FBI had

given a composite drawing of me to the

"I saw..."

"Sorry. Go on."

"When he arrived that night, all I had was

a ghetto blaster and earplugs. I was sitting

at one of the outside tables when he drove

up. He was in a bright red Alfa Romeo with opaque tinted windows. They were prob-

ably bulletproof as well!"

"He stepped out of his car and acted as if he didn't know about my killing of others. He made a half-hearded attempt at

small talk and offered me some coke. He put

the vial and a razor blade right in front of

me and then started using his power."

"He was trying to get you to slash your wrist with the razor?"

"Yes, but to do so I had to take my finger

off the pause button on the ghetto blaster. I had set it so it wouldn't be deafening, but startling. It broke his concentration long enough for me to use his own razor to rip open in regular vein.

"He was a very predictable individual. Even without Recognition, I would have been able to read him like a book. With it, I could have known what to do with your guess," Diana said. "One of the people in that town had the power of persuasion and leaves...possession?"

"He nodded.

"So fill in the details."

"We call him The Bodiless One. He had no true body of his own, rather, his personality dwelt within the bodies of other

people while residing in one temporary physical form, which in this case was Terry Anders, the town's city manager.

"Through physical contact, he could establish a temporary channel into a person's mind and take control of them at any given instant. The time that such a channel would remain open without renewed use was twenty-four hours, but eventually it would have grown to a week, then a month then a year until eventually one touch from him would be all it'd take to make you susceptible to his domination for the rest of your life."

"Getting at him was easy. If he'd been more cautious he would have taken residence in another body, which would have made finding him next to impossible, but The Bodiless One wasn't even remotely like the rest of us. He had no concern for what went on in the 'outside' world. He lived in his own little microcosm in Greenville. Virtually every person in the town was

"That leaves Greenville, Ohio. Let me either of them. Diana scanned her notepad.

"Well, if it wasn't persuasion that just leaves...possession?"

"He nodded.

"What does that have to do with your list? What does that have to do with your killing a clerk in a MaiK Market; seven

pedestrians, four people waiting for a bus, eight people in the express line of a Fazio's, four people in a Krispe Kreme, fourteen officers who were trying to stop you?"

"Tell me, were all those deaths really necessary?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Killing Anders was easy. He was so enraptured in his own world that he was unprepared for me. I simply waited outside of his office on a Friday afternoon and shot him as he entered his car. It was too quick for him to jump into another body. However, I hadn't counted on his having a son.

"I didn't realize my mistake at first, and as a matter of fact, I was almost out of town before Anders' son caught up with me.

"I was in a MaiK Market paying for gas. The clerk was a tall, thin woman with a beautiful heart. She didn't seem frightened by my burns, which should have tipped me off, but I was more concerned with what type of Pop Tarts they had. Right as I was reaching in the milk freezer, I looked into the circular mirror in the corner of the store.

"She was lowering a shotgun at me.

"I spun into the next aisle, but I was a little slow. Part of the blast caught the back of my left leg. Unable to stand, I watched the clerk in the mirror, wondering when she'd try again. She didn't. She just stood there listening. I decided to play possum.

"After about a minute of silence, she came out from behind the counter. When she saw me on the floor, her mouth made a small 'o'. She lowered her gun within inches of my hand and bent down to feel my pulse.

"A very stupid mistake.

"'Getting at her with her own gun I could feel a psychic scream in my head. She had been a charm and the person on the other end was feeling all her pain as she lied. The Anders kid could control the townspeople like his father, but he didn't have the maturity or strength to shield himself from their emotions in the process.'

"Controlling that many minds took nearly all of his concentration. Yet, as his power grew, he would find it easier and easier. Eventually he would have started

expanding his boundaries past Greenville, past Ohio, until..."

"Wait," she said, looking down at another list. "What does that have to do with your killing a clerk in a MaiK Market; seven

pedestrians, four people waiting for a bus, eight people in the express line of a Fazio's, four people in a Krispe Kreme, fourteen officers who were trying to stop you?"

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"been a charm and the person on the other

"end was feeling all her pain as she lied.

The Anders kid could control the townspeople

like his father, but he didn't have the

maturity or strength to shield himself from

their emotions in the process.'

"So your killing spree was actually an

attack directed against him?"

Angstrom nodded. "It lasted quite a while. The kid tried to nail me with [his] police while I made驾驶 his driving taking out

pedestrians and whoever else I could find. It wasn't very hard because the kid wasn't able to baffle minds very well - all the cops had slow reflexes and delayed reaction times. After I took out the people in a Friday afternoon and shot him as he entered

the edge. His cops stopped chasing me and

lights were going out in the town like in a

World War II movie. Eventually he had a group of firemen meet me in the middle of

the street. They told me the kid was giving

himself up and to follow them. They led me

to a house on the edge of the city. I went

inside. His mother was sitting at a table, tears running down her face. She grabbed

my hand and took me upstairs and showed

me his room. He was lying in bed and

watched me enter the room. He was a

paraplegic. Looking at him I could tell he

would never be a threat like the rest of the

tearful crowd was sitting at a table.

I pointed the magnum directly at him

and considered his fate."

"Tell me you didn't kill him."

"I didn't kill him." The words hung in

the air without the weight of any emotional

content."

Diana looked at her list. One question

remained unanswered:

"Why did you turn yourself in?"

"I saw. I see. I am Angstrom."

"Tell me what that means."

"It means nothing. It is what I was told

to say upon being asked questions. Persua-

sion!"

"The last of the seven. He got to you

before you got to him."

"I saw. I see..."

"Stop saying that and talk to me!"

"Recognition. That's my power. It means

I can read people. I can tell what they're

thinking and feeling. As my power in-

creased, I grew disenchanted with my

borders...plans of conquest and...decided I

"But you missed one."

"Yes. I was in a motel near the highway while. The kid tried to nail me with [his] police while I made driving taking out

pedestrians and whoever else I could find. The sound of his voice was all it took. Even on the phone his commands are irresistible. "He told me I see myself in and say nothing but 'I saw. I see. I am Angstrom'! assure he had the intention of making me out to be a deranged zealot. Only through pain and concentration could I say anything else."

"Who is it?"

"Remember what you said about Hitler?"

"Yes."

"Remember what I said about getting both Roark and his daughter?"

"Yes, but what does that..."

"Diana's voice stuck in her throat and her eyes focused on nothing. She mechanically shut off the tape recorder.

"That's why you picked me to interview you, isn't it?"

"Yes. Any children we have inherit the powers."

"You know I don't believe you."

"Part of you does. It is a very small part, and yet, as time passes and your father becomes more powerful, it will grow. And you will recognize your own power."

"No, no, no..."

"When the time comes, you will make the right decision. I can see it!"

With the room spinning around her, Diana scooped up her notes and tape recorder and stumbled out the door.

Outside, Officer Royston was waiting for him before he could say anything, she asked him for a telephone.

He took her into his office and handed it to her.

After three rings a voice answered on the other end.

"Hello?"

"Dad, this is Diana. I have to ask you..."

"Oh, Diana, I've got both Senator Bagwell and Senator Crockett on hold. Call me back later."

She gently replaced the receiver—unable

DEATHREALM

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Mind Hatching

The tarantula of orators
reveals in the anticipation
of his victim's slow bleed;

threads of tainted philosophies

spin from opium-induced dementias.
Like a voracious cocoon,
he waits for the hatch.

—Cathy Burdurz

(Continued from page 25)

comic work? Is there an underlying philosophy that is common in your writing—in other words, do you strive to write metaphor?

SMITH: A hefty portion of my fiction is based in metaphor, which is kind of strange considering that I never much cared for symbolism: like my messages right out in the open, in black and white in letters ten feet high! I sometimes do try to make some kind of statement on what a bitch it is to ride this boat, and not capsize. But us as much of my work is straight fantasy with no underlying meaning beyond an attempt at delivering a chill or a dark chuckle. Much of the time all I'm trying to do is scare the reader, to give him what he's frigging paid for!

DEATHREALM: Is your background one of horror? I don't mean was your father a mass murderer and your mother a vampire, but did your interest in dark things grow from a natural tendency towards them as a youth (as mine did), or was it a subject that gradually developed due to external circumstances?

SMITH: When I was eight years old, my father gave me a book on evolution, and that laid the foundation for a way of thinking that will take you beyond the fringes of reality. There are new worlds to live and die in... except in the imagination.

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based on logic and skepticism. Since I've been old enough to think and reason, I've been a materialist with no belief whatsoever

in the supernatural. At roughly the same time my dad was offering me science books I got a real kick reading about gods and demons and weird, impossible goings-on

when my mom gave me two books: *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES* and *THE OCTOBER COUNTRY*. I guess I can blame Bradbury for getting me started on writing horror fiction.

Beyond that, I couldn't really say. I do try to write about fears, about losing something. Other than that, I'm not sure what triggers the creative urge and haven't ever investigated it too deeply, to tell you the truth.

DEATHREALM: Who are your favorite horror writers? What subject matter within the genre do you find most appealing?

SMITH: My favorite horror writers are, from the past, Lovecraft, Howard, Leiber, Bradbury and the whole WEIRD TALES group. Of the more recent pack, I like Karl Wagner, Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, David Drake, Steve Rasnic Tem, and Robert Aitken kind of stands alone. When you talk about the really new folks, I enjoy Lisa Tuttle, David Schow, Joe Lansdale, Jeff

Oser, and Wayne Sallie—there's a shitload of excellent writers working in the anthology market, and in the small press. I could go on forever. I really think the two most important among us are Jeff Oser, for sheer original vision, and Wayne Sallie, who writes

work that transcends the genre, and will definitely garner wide recognition.

What I like about the genre is that it supports through sheer enthusiasm of its publishers—if not financially—a strong small press movement that does give a place for good stories to be seen, if even they're seen by a limited audience.

DEATHREALM: What do you not like about the genre? Who are your least favorite writers—and why?

SMITH: I think what frustrates me most about the genre, currently, is that there are virtually no professional markets for fiction.

WEIRD TALES publishes plenty of good fantasy yarns, but the editors don't seem to know or care what makes a good horror story. TWILIGHT ZONE and NIGHT CRY are gone, but they're not over really an open market for new writers. If it weren't for a few anthologies and Wagner's efforts at YEAR'S END, I doubt many people would see the best of what's being written—and most of the good stuff still gets lost in the small press in circulations of less than a thousand.

My least favorite writers are the ones who are lavished with what I feel is undeserved praise. First and foremost on my list here would be Clive Barker. He's done some nice stuff, but certainly not deserving of the attention his work has received. There are a LOT of bad novels out there, stuff that should never have seen the light, but that list, too, would be overwhelming, so why get started?

In addition, many writers frustrate me for not taking horror down any new paths. Most seem to content merely rehashing old concepts. I hate to sound like a broken record, but that's probably the main reason the work of Jeff Oser and Wayne Sallie so fascinate me—they're so bloody different!

DEATHREALM: What do you foresee in the horror market? For yourself, both professionally and in the small press. Already, from talking with novelists and agents I know, the market for novel length

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES ROBERT SMITH

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bursed in glory detail, they should keep their eyes peeled for *HELLRAISER* #6. I keep bashing my head against the comic market, with some results. Regardless of what happens concerning my two completed novels, I intend to continue to produce novel length fiction, and of course I take time out from all of the other to write short stories. Despite the hard realities, the frustrations and broken promises, it's still a lot of fun.

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S Y M P T O M

J A M E S R O B E R T S M I T H

FRED WAS FORGETTING something again. He rubbed at his forehead and reached for his shirt pocket where he kept his little notepad.

"Fred! Fred, are you listening to me?"

The voice crackled at him through the receiver he held pressed to his ear, black plastic nashing cartilage. Damn, he'd almost forgotten he was talking on the phone!

His mind wandered too much, sometimes.

"Yes, Will. I'm listening. Just got distracted

for a second. That's all!" It was Will

Hampton, old friend, bothering him about

PennCo again.

"Well, you'd better listen to me. This means as much to you as it does to the rest of us."

Fred plucked the small notepad from his pocket. (Yes, he was definitely forgetting something), flipping past the first page which was covered in his chicken scratch.

He tossed it to the desk top, whipped a pen from the Georgia Bulldogs coffee mug that was stationed nearby, and he began to scribble. "Yes, Will. Important. That's what you keep saying." His voice betrayed his disinterest and boredom.

"I'm telling you this is bad news! For all of us. My doctor—Sean Seagraves over at Memorial—he got the report back from my examination last month. There's been chromosome damage. Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you?" Fred Dorman could hear the anger lurking just beneath the surface of his old chum's voice.

Fred scribbled. *Seign, der, Mem Hos.*

"Seagraves, you say?"

A sigh of frustration. "Yes, Seagraves.

Sean Eugene Seagraves."

Dorman's pen jolted its way across the narrow page, dancing just beneath the warped binder that held the pages as one. "Chromosome damage, don't understand. You seemed okay when I saw you last week. What does this mean, Chromosome damage?"

"Christ, Fred! What the hell is wrong with you? I told you! I told you last week what all this means! I told you yesterday! This

is serious shit!"

Fred sighed, tapping the butt of his pen against the desk top, looking across at the bulldog scowling back at him from his coffee cup turned pen holder. The pen leaped up again, jabbing angrily at lined paper. *Chism, dring, Whim.* "Look, Will,

I don't see where this has anything to do with me. What do you want me to do about this morning. Something at home. The keys? His pocket jingled beneath his shirt. "It can do!"

There was a moment of silence from the other end. Will Hampton bit his lower lip to keep from screaming at his boyhood pal. He breathed out, Fred Dorman heard it—a long, even exhalation. "It's like this, Fred. I mean, if you're having medical problems, I can sympathize with that, but what

can I do?"

There was a moment of silence from the neighborhood when we were kids?"

Yes, he did remember that. That was one memory he had no problem with. Not at all. Fred Dorman, five years old (Will Hampton, too). Along about dusk on a summer's day in Port City, Georgia, it was 1963 and the call went, "Whoop! The rumble of an approaching motor, growling.

The voice of a child, "Here it comes! The mosquito truck!" Yahoo! There it was, rattling down Trade Street, coming into view. "Here it comes!" Turning down M Street. "Our street!" The rumble grew into a mechanical roar. Loud. Loud. Doors opened wide, spitting out bare-legged children. The kids poured out of yards, out of the trees into which they had climbed. The truck came rolling slowly on, creeping toward them at a patient ten miles per hour low on its carriage, loaded down as it was by the huge contraption on its back: the fogger. "It's here! It's here!" The call went out to every who had not heard it. More bare legs, bare feet, screeching mouths. The truck rolled on. Behind it, thick plumes of billowing white. A child darted in, disappeared. The acid stink swallowed him up. Others joined him. Fred did. Will did. They all did. All the children of Port City, Georgia who resided on M Street. There

they went, diving into the masking, smelly fog. They had no hills to race down. And it never snows in Port City. But they had a mosquito truck once a week in summertime.

"Fred! Are you listening to what I'm saying? Goddamnit it!"

The other man snapped back to attention. "Damm, what use he forgetting? Something this morning. Something at home. The keys! His pocket jingled beneath his shirt. "It can do!"

There was a moment of silence from the front of the Chamber of Commerce. I

don't want to hear it. But I just hoped that

we could count on you for this,"

"Well, Will, I wish that you'd reconsider.

Sib Cip, Sib Bub, Chip first, then Barbara.

"Sib, Sib bld."

"Christ, Fred. Go fuck yourself!" Will hung up.

After a while, Fred remembered to hang up the phone. He lifted the little pad, placed it in front of himself and jotted down what he'd forgotten to do.

By him.

He was pretty sure he could remember where he'd stored his shovel.

They were going to the state with this. Dr. Seagraves and I are going to be a lawyer, a firm from Atlanta, and we're going to bring a suit against PennCo. Are you going to help us, or not?



"Yes?" The line crackled. Held open, done those four things. Then what?"

"We're going to the state with this. Dr. Seagraves and I are going to be a lawyer, a firm from Atlanta, and we're going to bring a suit against PennCo. Are you going to help us, or not?

"You know, Will, I've got a lot of friends at PennCo. They mean a lot to this town. They're your friends, too!" He stated at the

"Save it, Fred. Save it for your speeches

pad. It was coming back to him. *Std My*

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THIS NOVEL HAS been around since 1988, the year it won the National Book Award. It bears mentioning all the same, as it is still available and is the sort of book horror fans ought not to miss. You might not find it under "Horror" on the book racks; try "Literature" or "Modern Fiction"—all such distinctions being purely arbitrary.

What impresses me about the book is Dexter's hard-edged, understated prose, the claustrophobic atmosphere of paranoia he creates. He psychologically disorienting effect he gives to routine acts of cruelty and revenge.

Paris Trout is a shopkeeping money-lender in Coton Point, Georgia, circa the 1950s. He is a man of few words, yet as his plain-spoken wife unfolds, and as his plain-spoken philosophy presents itself, we see him as a soulless, intractable monster in human form. A sociopath who perceives himself as the center of the universe, he recognizes no laws but those of his own devising. When a black man defaults on a car loan, Trout hires a local redneck to drive him out to the man's house, where, armed with a handgun, Trout and his accomplice open fire. A fourteen-year-old girl, present purely as a matter of circumstance, is shot by Paris Trout and dies. The murder, surely no oddity in that violently racist era, proves to be an anomaly. The helplessness of the victim, who had harmed no one, in contrast to the preponderant guilt of her killer, who displays no remorse, creates a ripple effect that disturbs the rest of the community.

As you may infer, this is no horror novel of werewolves or creeping slime. The slime is in the heart of the title character.

The murder of the child is not the end of Trout's degeneration, in an act reminiscent of Poe's assault of temple Drake in Faulkner's *SANCTUARY*, he violates his own wife with a bottle of mineral water. He is the perfect example of the sort of aberrant personality—a Charles Whitman or Jim Jones—who, by the very nature of his unbalanced behavior, can float and defy con-

ventional justice, balanced as it is upon a reasonable concept of moral responsibility.

Paris Trout is both amoral and irresponsible.

It captures and holds interest to the end.

From the manner in which an adulterous couple go about having intercourse, to the strange scene in which some bogus cops struggle to place Paris Trout in the stocks,

much of what takes place in this novel sticks with you long after you have put it down.

I recommend it to anyone sincerely interested in gaining insight into the darker aspects of the human mind.

BOOKS OF BLURBS, Vol. I
By Stephen King
1990 Parrot Books/\$19.95
4,589 Pages

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE SHINING, Stephen King's career as the world's foremost author of book-cover bluffs began. A rich sampling are collected here for the first time. Early efforts, such as "terrifying" and "it scared even me"—noted now for their minimalism—are included, along with his more turbid output, but by far the definitive King, in a single sitting, although definitive King, is the subject of some controversy—there being a dispute over whether he made the statement in reference to something by Kelly's story is set in the arid back of West Texas, in the fictitious town of Sulphur Springs, peopled by cartoon shirkers, clichéd bigots and an allegedly prescient Apache loner named Bowie Kane, who, despite his sixth-sense, is too dumb to get out of so detestable a place.

Seems some of the local sportsmen have gone from raising pitbulls to a particularly malicious breed of Tasmanian devil. The creatures are infused with demonic intelligence grafted to hocus-pocus indian mysticism. Their leader, a "pig-devil," named Laz, launches an attack on the human populace, and it is named "Clive Barker," King's imagination waned. A definite low point was "Garfield-Reeves" is Tom Clancy of Horror?" Is White Cloud the Tom Clancy of toilet paper? The collection is not without its pleasant surprises, however. There's the formerly exasperated blurb that was to have

"graced" wife Tarraha's *SMALL WORLD*: "Barn Wood keeps King up at night, but always take Tarraha King to bed." Regarding Foyever's assault of temple Drake in *Faulkner's SANCTUARY*, he violates his own wife with a bottle of mineral water. He is the perfect example of the sort of aberrant personality—a Charles Whitman or Jim Jones—who, by the very nature of his unbalanced behavior, can float and defy con-

as well, that more paperback covers shall bear the name of Stephen King than that of any other writer in history.

PITFALL by Ronald Kelly
1990 Zebra/\$3.95
320 Pages

INORMALLY SKIP failing a novel's cover design. My business here is critiquing prose, not art and besides, most writers have little control over what goes on their books' covers. But *Zebra's* choice of art for *PITFALL* bothers me. A camo silhouette of a wild thing howling over a wooded lake is

all wrong for horror fiction. It belongs on the front of either a H. Rider Haggard or a Jack London reissue. Bloodthirsty eyes and lunging jaws are needed here.

Unfortunately, the novel's shortcomings only begin with the cover.

Kelly's story is set in the arid back of West Texas, in the fictitious town of Sulphur

Spring, peopled by cartoon shirkers, clichéd bigots and an allegedly prescient Apache loner named Bowie Kane, who,

despite his sixth-sense, is too dumb to get out of so detestable a place.

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gone from raising pitbulls to a particularly malicious breed of Tasmanian devil. The creatures are infused with demonic intelligence grafted to hocus-pocus indian mysticism. Their leader, a "pig-devil," named Laz,

launches an attack on the human populace,

managing—thank God for poetic justice—to eliminate most of the novel's more repellent individuals.

The only thing more wooden than the writing (*He dreamt of a time of great awakening*, as well as *an insatiable hunger beyond that which he had ever known*) is the characterization of Bowie Kane. As the novel is one marginally sympathetic figure, much depends on him to make it all worthwhile. But he is unconvincing, even putting down into the dialogue that Kelley keeps

The concept of cannibes as antagonists in a horror yarn is a sort of curious sub-

genre to the werewolf motif, a category encompassing such disparate elements as

the killer shrews of the camp movie classic of that name, to *NIGHTMARE'S* vampire bats. Whitley Streiber may have done it best with his early novel *THE WOLFEN*.

But with *PITFALL*, Ronald Kelly fails to satisfy. His plot is almost viable, yet energy spent developing characters and honing prose is wasted detailing lowlife behavior. The frightening thing about this novel is that it goes on for 320 pages.

THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE
by Lawrence Watt-Evans
1990 Onyx/\$3.95
254 Pages

CONSTRUCTED LIKE a low-budget movie with a premise right out of *INVA-*

SION OF THE BLOOD SNATCHERS, Watt-Evans' novel for all its faults, is a fairly enjoyable little read.

For one thing, he avoids the attention-numbing bulk paragraphs so many horror writers are prone to. Exposition gives way to action in clips of incident and dialogue. This is a cop novel, writing in a horror milieu.

The plot deals with a group of D.C. apartment dwellers who have been eaten and physically duplicated by monsters. A small band of vigilantes, led by a man with the mundane name of Ed Smith, sets out to destroy them. Naturally, this isn't easy. Not only are bullets useless against the monsters, but that age-old vampire-stopper, the stake through the heart, proves futile as well.

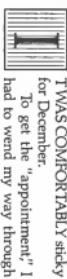
Watt-Evans, for whatever reason, gives the cardboard characters of his novel funny names (a boss named Einar, a neighbor named Attila). This tends to get irritating at times, but is no real hindrance.

There is not an ounce of pretension at work here. The narrative is entirely superficial, a stock cast being run through a set course of shocks. Even the gore scenes are handled in brief. It almost reads like a treatise to a *George Romero* film.

THE NIGHTMARE PEOPLE produces few, if any genuine chills. Its strength is in its ability to entertain. Watt-Evans is adept at keeping things going. His opening is a grabber, his dialogue mostly sharp, and somewhat witty. But he is unconvincing, even putting down into the dialogue that Kelley keeps

(Continued on page 53)

BY D. F. LEWIS



"Not now, halfpint tippler, but once I did!"

I went on to describe how the arrows on the man would take me to a man who could give me a fortune—if I was the right man for whom we were seeking. Apparently, this was an old legend of the Dark Parts, where either things were or weren't. This particular individual had "sent out" over the decades for various others, none of whom had been the one he wanted. Who knows? I may indeed be that one I thought. I trusted that busyboddy. So I bought him a round of drinks and set off immediately in accordance with the map's directions (so mettulously explained by a near-stranger in a pub with a beard).

Soon, even the blazing shop windows gave out. Luckily, the lambent, plangent glow from the lighted part of the city did not allow me to feel my way along doublets, allowing me to feel my way along warehouse walls. The vestigial gantries sticking out from just above eyeline looked like cogwheels of darkness, clustered together from the distant yellow streetlights. I did not wonder why I thought such things.

The second blind alley on the right, if I were not too much mistaken, would lead me to where the Host received his Suitors. Thunder murmured threats of lightning under its hot breath. There was not a blind alley where the map said it would be—so I had to take the third on the right, instead. Here was more illumination than was good for it, whether it was the City glow. I could not discern its source, but its subject matter was the most rambshackly array of misshapen, windowless two-story buildings I had ever dreaded to have a look at. The gutters hung so low, they scraped along the top of my head, through the skull of which could be felt a jellyfish substance jiggling in the tunnels. I proceeded further towards the Dead End.

A busyboddy who happened to be sitting

the other side of me turned his attention away from his half-started beer and, with a finger new-mooned with dubious filth, pointed at the diagram in my lap.

"That looks like a map of the Dark Side of the City, Mister. Nobody ever goes there,

cept the people who live there!" "Do you live there, Drunkard?" I was dismayed by the busyboddy's beard. For it was evidently false....

"Let me introduce myself, as no one else is likely to do so—my name is Bloodbone. His voice was neutral, neither frightening nor comforting. He fanned out a series of photographs in his hand, bearing what seemed to be black and white snapshots of various cuts of gay butcher's rubble. 'Do you recognize any of these?'

"I don't understand. Mr. Bloodbone, I'm afraid."

He withdrew the flickering torch from his face. By his look, I could tell I had failed the test. There was a cruel gash for the mouth where the grey giblet tongue lolled out, an over-nourished ringworm turned inside out by a cancerous infection. His eyes opened directly on to the pulsating

brain, which was incubitating blackened brains, even as I watched. The nostrils of the bulbous, gaped wider with each of Bloodbone's breaths, revealing a whole system of twitchings, fatiguing bogies, a whole scabby township of them—in varying shades of pure white.

He signed movingly, as I realized he had unravelled my mindards like a peeler underneath a comely wench just with his eyes. He had been searching desperately for another of his kind, whose bodily parts were black and white, like the old B-Movie days.

I fled in tears. As the lightning's crazy zigzags paved the night sky, I realized that God must be taking photographs.

Forbidden Texts (Continued from page 52)
times—intentionally or not—he rewards the reader with a dash of wry humor.
Read it with some Jiffy Pop and a can of Pepsi Lite.

GRIMM MEMORIALS by R. Patrick Gates
1990 Onyx/\$4.95
367 Pages

IT IS NO secret that children's literature is an ancient source of seminal terror. Among the lesser-known fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm is one in which the Devil forces a man who has bargained with him to chop off his own daughter. Elsewhere

a woman gives birth to mutants, one girl having a lone cyclopean eye in the middle of her forehead, another having three eyes. Ever-popular are instances of grandma-eating wolves, frog princes and broomes trying to possess human offspring. Gated makes splendid use of the fairy tale as a horror story in *GRIMM MEMORIALS*. An aging witch named Eleanor Grimm, lone descendant of a "perverted matriarch," is on a quest for innocents to sacrifice in occult rituals. She is aided by a dark force—"the Machine," her name for that which enables her to project non-threatening, images of herself to others. Eleanor recreates scenes from fairy tales as a means of enchanting

and luring her impressionable victims. To entice a little boy from the safety of his bedroom, she conjures up a realm of figures from Mother Goose. Under the guise of the Lewis Carroll characters Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum, she abducts some twins from a shopping mall. By a variety of illusions, adults are caught off guard, distracted from protecting their little ones. To Steve Naior, one of the novel's leading characters, Eleanor appears as a sexually-exciting young female; to Naior's pregnant wife Diane, she appears as Diane's long-dead father, telling her not to have sex with Steve, as it will harm her baby. The resulting tension—Steve's arousal, Diane's coldness—creates the perfect breakdown in defenses for the old witch to work her wiles on the Naior children.

At its grimarest, the novel deals unfinchingly with cannibalism, necrophilia and torture. Gates draws his characters (even Naior, not at times) sympathetically (even Naior children are real—theyicker and tease); their flight involves us.

Tension builds with expert professionalism. Gates occasionally resorts to tricks, as when a crucial note is blown out of sight under a table. Yet the tricks work here. *GRIMM MEMORIALS* goes places. It moves well. It pays off.

B R O K E N T H I N G S

BY NINA KIRIKI HOFFMAN



carrying the bird; its head wobbled from her hand.

"It's broken its neck," said Milton. "Put it in the trash and wash your hands, Ginger; birds are full of parasites."

But Ginger begged and pleaded with him, and at last he embalmed the little corpse for her and laid it out on a bit of white satin in a shoebox. Anna watched the process, the draining of the blood, the injection with Formalin, as she had before.

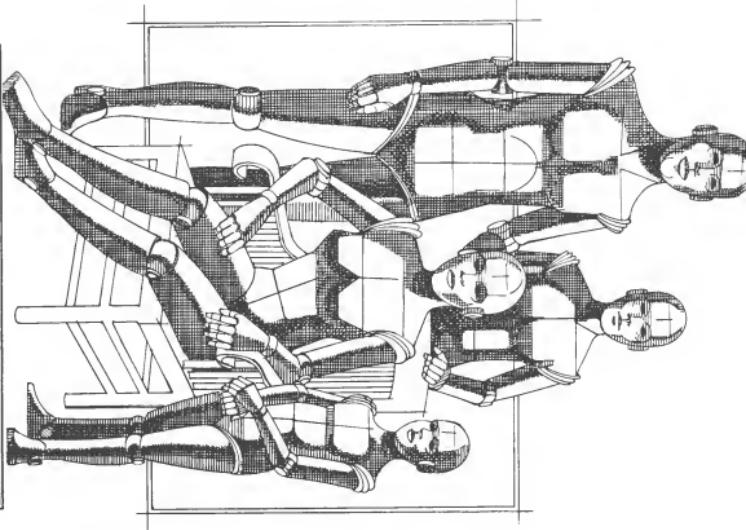
Milton wanted her to know the business. When they had arranged the bird so that it looked nice, they showed it to Ginger and then held a funeral for it.

Ginger things. Ginger, reaching and reaching her dirty little fingers into the cookie dough, snatching mouthfuls, sucking her fingers and sticking them back into the dough, no matter how many times Anna told her not to. Finally Anna had taken a wooden spoon, and held one of Milton's fat little hands on the counter, and—how the child could scream. But Anna hadn't been Ginger's fingers, or even the skin. She had only been trying to teach Ginger a lesson. Why didn't he connect this spunking with broken things?

"Mrs. Hutchinson?"
She glanced up. The pain in her stomach felt as shark's teeth, gnawing at her. A small wizened man wearing thick-framed glasses and a doctor's white coat stood there. His knees shrank; his eyes, the brown irises were the size of peas. "Mrs. Hutchinson, your daughter..."
"Yes?"
"I'm very sorry."

"To pay, forms to sign, people she had to convince; yes, Ginger's body should come to Hutchinson's Mortuary. My husband will take care of everything. It was dawn by the time Anna and Ginger were alone together, and Anna was drooping with exhaustion, and Ginger was silent. And yet—"

The small and private smile.
Because finally, Ginger would do exactly what Anna wanted her to. Wear what Anna decided on, style her hair as Anna willed, and, given the tools in the basement of the



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and she could stay out, until she did something else. Mother and Father thought was wicked.

Broken things. The bird that had flown into their picture window one morning when she and Milton and Ginger were all eating breakfast at the table, enjoying the view of the sun on the yew trees outside. Ginger, then just a little girl, chubby rather than obese, had run out, come back

Ginger, my fat, sullen, intractable, teenaged daughter.

Ginger, whom I wanted so much to love and cherish.

Her mother's cold voice, speaking through the locked closet door, while Anna stood there in the coat-muffled, mothballed darkness, her hands flat against the wood. "You have a willful, evil spirit, Anna. It wants breaking. Think, child. Think. If Anna beat on the door and yelled, they would leave her in there much longer, if she were quiet, they would let her out sooner. And she could stay out, until she did something else. Mother and Father thought

it wants breaking. Think, child. Think. About now to be good."

If Anna beat on the door and yelled, they would leave her in there much longer, if she were quiet, they would let her out sooner. And she could stay out, until she did something else. Mother and Father thought was wicked.

Broken things. The bird that had flown

into their picture window one morning when she and Milton and Ginger were all eating breakfast at the table, enjoying the view of the sun on the yew trees outside. Ginger, then just a little girl, chubby rather than obese, had run out, come back

BROKEN THINGS (Continued)

mortuary, and a few of the things Anna had found while prowling the hospital, have the figure Anna had always tried to help her have. At last somebody would be the perfect child, the child Anna had never been, the child Ginger had refused to be.

Until now.

Thinking of how her parents up in heaven would smile when they saw Ginger, perfect, in her casket, Anna touched her perfect child's cold face and smiled. At last she had something she could mend.

LETTERS (Continued from page 5)

In a previous letter, I mentioned that I had mixed feelings for the work of Harry Fassl. Well, in the past few months, I've had the opportunity to see more of his work and I've become a big fan. Fassl's work in #12 was unsettling and intriguing, and I think it's merely a matter of time before he reaches the level of photo/illustrators like J.K. Potter and Harry O. Morris.

DEATHS DOOR (Continued from page 27) of what not to do in a work of fiction.

As far as the "fact" portion of the magazine, the only really useful piece was Kevin J. Anderson's article on creative writing

classes. Coming from a fellow who has sold nine novels in three years, I would certainly be inclined to take his advice, or at least listen to what he has to say. The other non-fiction pieces were various reviews on movies and video tapes, none particularly well-written or well-argued.

Beyond what I can only describe as a certain, disturbing feel of this zine promoting some quasi-religious movement (big ads for 900 numbers involving "personal occult, paranormal, etc. experiences") the complete package was somewhat pleasing. I'll give the whole thing a 5 on a 10-point scale.

DAGGER OF THE MIND #1 • Arthur William Lloyd Breach, 1317 Hock Ridge Dr., El Paso, TX 79925 • 8" x 8" • 62 pages, \$3.50 for single issue, 2-issue sub \$8.00, 4-issue sub \$16.00.

Someone, look at the prices of this magazine, do a little math, and tell me if something doesn't seem somehow amiss.

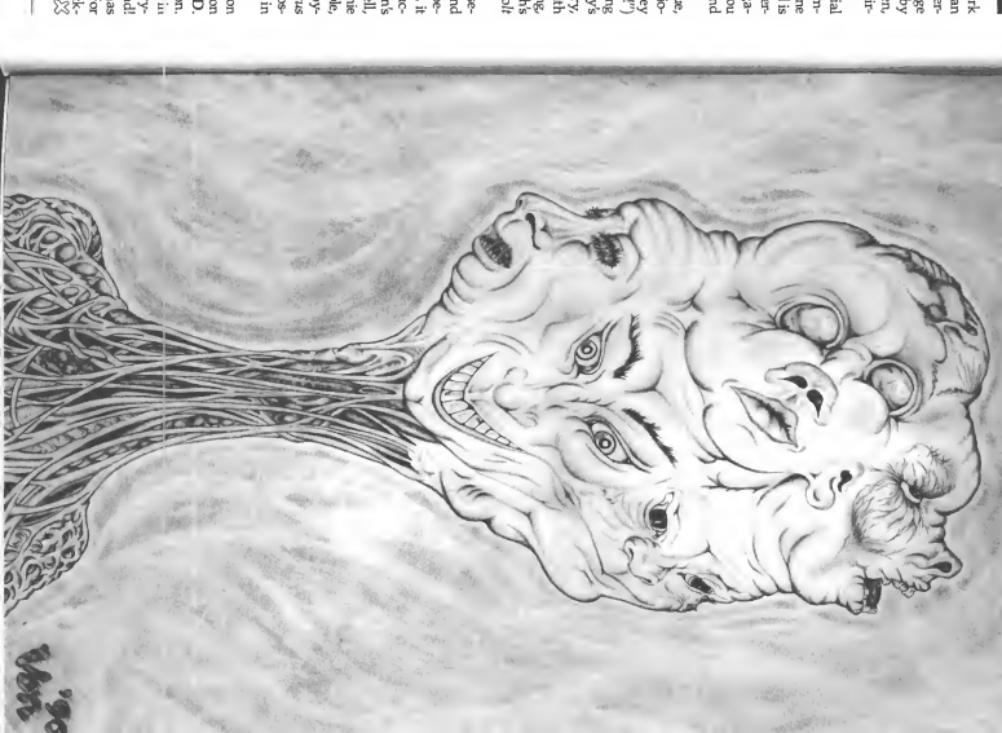
The packaging of this new horror/dark fantasy offering is very attractive, with an amusing, fantasy-oriented cover, laser-printed text, and generally good page designs. Except for some comic work by Kenneth R. Cheyne, Michael Allen Clausen and Al Manacino & Duncan, art is virtually non-existent.

Also, there is a noticeable lack of editorial presence here. Mr. Beach appears very impersonal and distant, leaving the magazine with a slightly cold tone. His only editorial is near the end of the magazine, and it's a superficial blurb for DAGGER, with the obligatory quip, "we're broadening the way you look at literature and the world around you." Sure.

There is some very nice fiction in the issue, as well as some that fails to rise above mediocrity. I wasn't very taken with the Sidney Williams ("The Rising Force in Horror") piece. Alone—a very bland message among some excessive verbiage. Margaret Frasley's "The Shattered Window" was not a story, rather, it was a nearly 1,500 word summary with no dialogue, breaking no new ground, being in fact, too reminiscent of Arthur Breach's tale *The Nightmare of Robert Edwin Holt* in DEATHREALM #10.

Breach's Return of the *White Ship* is a sequel to H.P. Lovecraft's *The White Ship*, and is surprisingly intense and beautifully poetic. A bit overlong for what it has to say, it nevertheless ranks as an honest-to-God successful Lovecraft pastiche. Barry Hoffman's tale *Unfinished Business* reads very well, with realistic characterization. I found Jamie Meyers' sad *The Damned* a tad predictable, but very nicely done and thoroughly enjoyable. Mark Rainey's *Symphony Maleficetus* isn't as pretentious as it sounds; it's an atmospheric tale reminiscent of his *Threnody* in DEATHREALM #2.

An interview with Barry Hoffman on censorship and a very good article on Charles Fort and the cred of doubt" by D. Douglas Graham comprise the non-fiction. (You know, I really hate excessive typos in a magazine. In this issue, they're everywhere. Editors, I implore you. Proofread! It's not that difficult!) When a reader has to muddle his way through so much shit for type, it doesn't matter how nice your packing is. Take note.





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